

A/N: Hey, it's moonfyre! This is my first real story on so go easy on me, ok? Here's the details:

Full Summary: AU. Seven-year-old Harry is discovered missing only a day before Sirius Black escapes Azkaban, and an angry werewolf, among others, immediately begins to search for him, hoping to find the boy before the criminal does. Little does anyone know that Harry has a secret of his own...

Rating: PG for some mentions of child abuse.

That's it. For the record, this is (or hopefully will be) the only time I'll put my Author's Notes at the top. From now on, unless there's something really important, I'll put them at the bottom.

And, without further ado...

Shift

One — Prologue (November 20, 1986)

Harry could never be sure if it was nighttime or early morning when he ran away. He only remembered the darkness of the cupboard under the stairs, empty of anything at all except the small tattered backpack filled with all of his possessions: two sets of Dudley's old clothes, a woolen blanket that he had stolen from under Aunt Petunia's bed earlier that day, and *The Hobbit*, a book Dudley had never read and probably wouldn't miss. He remembered the how the cupboard door had been unlocked that night, and how stealthily he had slipped out. He remembered grabbing a few fruits and bits of bread to last him for a day or two, and then he remembered the easy click of the lock on the front door as he stole away.

After that, all he could remember was the wind in his ears as he hurried away from everything he had ever known. He ran from Uncle Vernon's beatings and shouts of anger, Aunt Petunia's scoffs of disapproval and disgust, Dudley's taunts and punches. He ran away from "normal". He wasn't normal and he never would be, so the least he could do for everyone else was get away. Uncle Vernon had told him time and time again what a liability he was, how his existence

had ruined their lives. It was better off this way. At least he could be a freak where no one would find him.

Running came easier than he had expected, especially considering the bruises and scars that littered his entire body. It also calmed him, and his thoughts became less and less frantic with every step he took.

It was the kind of night where the moon was silvery and round in the heavens, but not quite full. Stars were scattered everywhere, soft and dim, and a few clouds drifted sleepily across the sky, as though reminding Harry that he should have dozed off a long time ago. He eventually tired and his running slowed to a jog, then to a walk. A gentle breeze ruffled his hair, and his bright green eyes glanced at the dark shapes of trees and bushes that loomed along the road.

It was then that Harry realized for the very first time that he had absolutely no idea where he was going. His plan had included...well... pack up, grab some food, and leave. He hadn't really thought about where to go; the important thing at the time had been leaving. His steps began to slow almost to a stop. He didn't even know where he was; he didn't even have a plan.

There was a gentle hoot from somewhere behind him; Harry jumped and spun around to see a pair of brilliant golden eyes. An owl. The boy shuddered, turned back around and continued walking, hugging himself to keep warm. He didn't know what to do.

He was still in a residential area, but the houses weren't as neat and tidy as Privet Drive's. Weeds and plants grew haphazardly in all of the yards, and the paint on most of the houses was peeling. Vines were starting to grow up many of the walls of the houses. Some of the shingles on the roof were missing or falling off, most of the doors were boarded up, and many of the windows were cracked or broken completely. He'd never been this far from the Dursley's before. The houses here looked much more comfortable and more casual than Privet Drive had, and this more than anything made Harry nervous: it was as though it had taken until now for him to realize that everything was going to change. Harry gave an involuntary shiver.

Then something hit him.

His steps quickened again as he realized something that he should have known all along: Wherever I'm going, it's got to be better than what I'm leaving behind.

(One year later, November 25, 1987)

Remus sipped the tea out of his cup slowly and deliberately, as though drinking tea was a function that took a lot of concentration. His brown-and-slowly-fading-to-grey hair was a bit untidy, and his eyes were staring across the room at absolutely nothing.

He sat in the main room of his home – Wolfden Cottage, London. The word cottage, of course, happened to be something of a misnomer: he lived either in a rather large, spacious house or a small, cramped mansion – whichever version you prefer. It was a nice place to live, to tell the truth, and Remus was quite lucky to be living there. The muggle who had sold it to him had priced it very cheaply as a result of the rats and termites that had made their homes in the walls. After a few charms, however, everything was as good as new. There was far more space in the cottage than he really needed, and he ended up only using a few of the rooms – a bedroom, bathroom, kitchen, and the living room.

A fire crackled away heartily, flames dancing and making long, dancing shadows around the room. They seemed merry, twisting and turning with a happiness that contrasted sharply with the werewolf's sullen mood.

In truth, Remus wasn't thinking about drinking his tea or sipping slowly or anything of the sort. His thoughts weren't even in the present, but in the past. His eyes were unfocused, and his mind had long since slipped back to a time when everything was less complicated.

A raven-haired man threw a small child into the air, catching him as he fell back down. The man's clear blue eyes sparkled in amusement as the infant giggled and laughed, clearly enjoying himself. After a while, the man caught the baby one last time and held him in his arms, smiling and peering down at the bubbly, gurgling child. How

could a traitor look down at someone he would betray with such tenderness?

“You naughty boy, Harry,” the man said playfully, fake-admonishing the child. “You know better than to play with Padfoot’s hair.”

The baby boy just cooed and reached for a lock of Sirius’ shiny, dark hair.

“Ah-ah-ah!” The man said, laughing. “Play nice, Harry! This calls for more punishment.”

Sirius threw the child up in the air, his grin widening when the young child shrieked with joy, flailing his arms and legs.

Another man watched, a man with jet-black, scruffy hair. James’ hazel eyes danced with amusement as he observed his friend’s antics and his son’s laughter.

“Be careful, Sirius.” he grinned, “You drop my son and I’ll revoke all of your godfather privileges.” His eyes followed his son’s progress through the air, but he was still grinning and carelessly leaning back in his chair. His feet were propped up on the table, hands resting casually behind his head. He knew, really, that Sirius would never do anything to harm his child.

Sirius grinned again. “Careful is – ”

“ – your middle name,” said Lily, her red hair catching the light as she shook her head fondly. She slapped at James’ feet, and her husband just laughed and put them on the floor, having the decency to at least look mildly apologetic. “As I recall, your middle name is also trouble, sexy, and prankster. I suppose it changes whenever it wants to.”

Sirius just shrugged, catching Harry again. “One can have multiple middle names.” Lily just smiled, her green eyes only watching Harry half the time. She trusted Sirius. They all did.

Back then, Remus and Sirius used to come over almost every night for a home-cooked meal. They were both busy with Order work, and

Lily was always more than happy to cook for herself and the three of them: Peter wasn't usually available these days, so there was more often than not an empty chair at the table, except when her old friend Arabella dropped by. Nevertheless, the conversation flowed freely from Quidditch to Harry's newest accomplishments to what their old Hogwarts friends were up to and just about everything else. The world was all smiles and laughter, at least for the hour or so every day when they were able to play and joke as though a war wasn't going on.

"Bye-bye, little Harry. I must go," Sirius said, pausing dramatically. "Duty calls...that, and the fact that Lils and Jimmy-boy are kicking me and Rem out of their house for the night."

Sirius deposited the baby in his father's arms. "There's a full order meeting. Tomorrow."

James nodded solemnly, his expression shadowing a little. It brightened quickly. "I half wish we were still young enough to prank Snape. The dirty ba—(Lily shot him a look)—The dirty man—glared at me all of last meeting after I talked about Harry."

In a chair near Lily and James', Remus chuckled. "You mean you wish you were still immature enough to be 'allowed' to prank him."

"What do you mean 'wish'?" Lily laughed, and opened her mouth to chastise them for ever pranking the potions master. Sirius, upon seeing this, hastily spoke first.

"Bye, Moony! Bye, Prongs and Lily-Flower. And bye, Prongslet!"

"Bye, Padfoot. See you tomorrow at the meeting."

Sirius nodded curtly, still smiling as always, and stepped out into the dark night to be surrounded by shadows.

To this day, Remus still couldn't understand it. Why would he have done something like that? What reason would Sirius have had for selling his best friends out?

An idea popped into Remus' head, disappearing almost as soon as he felt it. He tried to grasp it, but it slithered away to bury itself deep within the recesses of his mind until a time when it would find its way back out to tease him once more. It had often taunted him over the years, letting him get close, then shimmering away in the blink of an eye. It was the key to unlocking the reasons behind Sirius' actions, he knew – the missing piece to the puzzle. It only popped up when he was thinking about his best...ex-best friend.

Remus grumbled, resuming his original activity. He sat on the couch for over an hour, thinking by firelight, before finally drifting off to sleep.

His eyes snapped open as the flames in the fireplace burned an emerald green. He sat up to watch it flicker and flare for a moment, and then someone stepped out of the fireplace. He recognized his old friend at once by her dark blonde hair and grey eyes.

"Bella!" He said to the woman, getting out of his seat. "How are you? Would you like to sit d—?"

"No time for that, Remus," she cut in abruptly, and the worry covering her face quickly wiped the smile off of Remus's. He looked at her. She was a bit older and grayer than he remembered, but that was to be expected. Besides, he assumed that he probably looked just as worn as she did. Losing your best friends all at once did that to people. Her eyes had lost the bright spark they had carried for so long, and she looked tired and anxious. Her hair stuck out here and there, as though she had been in such a rush to talk to him that she had hurried through it. She brought her eyes up to meet his, and they were filled with sadness and a hint of guilt.

"Is something wrong?" he asked quietly, still searching her as though he could find the answer.

"Yes. Remus, when was the last time you heard from Harry?" Remus blinked. That was a surprise.

"I haven't. Not since...not since that Halloween. I've tried to get custody of him more times than I can count, but the Ministry won't let

a werewolf take care of a child." He said regretfully, and almost bitterly.

Arabella looked at him with sympathy, knowing how much Lily and James' son meant to the man. Then she straightened up and looked him in the eye, and Remus mentally cowered in fear at what could possibly be so important that the normally joyful Arabella would be so serious.

"I haven't heard from him either. Not in a while, anyway. Then, today, I finally went to the Dursleys to ask where he was—in my disguise as an old lady, of course, since I'm supposed to watch Harry using that—and...they don't know. Or care."

Remus' mind was numb, and he spoke hazily. "Can you repeat that?"

"Harry's lost, Remus. Or run off. They'd hardly ever let him out of the house before, and I hadn't seen him in ages...of course, I'd been busy with other things at the time and I didn't notice," Arabella said, looking angry with herself. "Anyway," she continued, shaking her head, "I told Dumbledore just this morning. He doesn't want to do it, but he feels like he should contact the ministry about this whole thing. He hasn't had an Order since You-know-who's downfall, so he'll need Aurors or investigators or Hit wizards or heaven knows who else to look for him. I suppose the more people who know, the better. That way someone's bound to find him. But with Fudge being the minister..."

She left the sentence hanging, but Remus knew what she meant. The minister wasn't the best person to have in office, stubborn git that he was. Who knew how he would react to The-Boy-Who-Lived's disappearance.

"Where could he have gone?" Remus whispered.

"I don't know Remus. I just don't know."

Disclaimer for all chapters: Harry Potter and all related characters and all that junk belong to J. K. Rowling and/or Warner Bros. and definitely not me.

A/N: Alright, what do you think so far? Constructive criticism is welcome, but please, no flames!

Thanks for reading, and reviews will make the next chapter come faster!

Moonfyre

Two – Promises

(November 26, 1987)

Saying that Azkaban was cold was like saying that Voldemort was simply misunderstood.

Azkaban wasn't just cold, it was freezing. The chilling, unpleasant sensation of dementors never left people, even when they got out. If they got out. It was a cold that seeped into people's very bones and grabbed them with fingers of ice, and sometimes it never let go.

The prison was made of harsh, grey walls of stone that caused even the smallest noise to echo coldly down the corridors, and the corridors themselves were constantly changing, the stairways perpetually moving. Even if a prisoner managed to escape his cell, it would be nearly impossible for him to find a safe passage out, and he would most likely die from the chill beforehand. There were very few windows in the castle. In the winter, when strong winds blew in to one side, they entered these windows and added an unwelcome iciness to the air. Light hardly ever filtered in through them anyway, and the resulting darkness was one so black and deep that it seemed to twist and warp at all times, taking the shape of whatever demons a prisoner might fear, staring at them in the night, a piercing glare that kept them wide awake with fear for hours on end.

If they were even still sane enough to notice it.

But the demon darkness was not even the worst thing about Azkaban – no, things got much, much worse. Dementors—demon children—guarded the hallways. Their stature was taller than the tallest man, but thin and dark. Their breath was colder than winter's chill itself, their cloaks a veil of blackness darker than the infinite ebony space between the night stars. Their skin was scaled and rotting, hardly resembling flesh. They swept along stone corridors, sucking happiness away and the very thoughts out of victims heads. It was no wonder that any sensible wizard feared them. A hood always cloaked their heads. The only ones to have ever seen their faces were dead, or a mere shell of themselves.

It's a wonder that any story should begin here. But this one does.

In the farthest cell to the right on the uppermost floor of the prison lay a raven-haired man. Actually, if you didn't already know that his hair was black, you'd have said it was brown. It was so streaked with grime and filth that it didn't even look like hair. His skin was almost leathery, but he was quite thin. Too thin. If he were to take his prison shirt off, you could probably count every rib – he was a walking skeleton. He lay in the threadbare cot to one side of the cell, body limp. But not asleep. His blue eyes were wide open as he stared at the wall across from him, looking at nothing and everything. They sparkled with life – only a little life was left in him, mind you, but it was life just the same – more life than any other prisoner.

There were a few clicks in the distance. He ignored them, dismissing them as a figment of his imagination. But after a while, they grew closer and louder, and he felt a growing chill that had gotten to be oddly familiar through the years. It was the click of shoes and the chill of a dementor. As he lay on his cot wondering who on earth was coming to see a prisoner, someone stopped outside of the bars on his cell.

As fate would have it, Minister Fudge stood in front of one of the most infamous criminal “masterminds” in almost a century, with a dementor flanking his left side.

Sirius Black—for that was the prisoner’s name—couldn’t trust himself to speak. But he tried anyway.

“Lo Minister,” he croaked in a low, raspy voice.

Fudge looked at him in disgust, but Sirius had long since gotten used to Fudge’s yearly visits. He assumed that these visits were necessary for Fudge, as his looks of repulsion meant that he couldn’t possibly be here on holiday. So, Sirius figured that a year must have gone by since Fudge’s last visit.

“Don’t ‘hello’ me, Black. Disgusting. If I...”

Sirius tuned out his response. For some reason, it didn’t feel like a year had passed. Sirius’ blue eyes traveled over to a wall covered in

little marks. There were so many lines covering the wall, so many markings. Each one represented another day spent in this prison. So many days. Together, the lines looked like a piece of artwork – a very confused, jumbled, deformed piece of artwork. They covered the entire wall, like a young child's scribbles.

It hadn't been a year since Fudge's last visit. Not even half of one.

"What day is it?" he said, interrupting the minister's monologue and still trying to get used to the raspy sound of his own voice.

The look of disgust had still not slipped from Fudge's face. "First of November." He answered tersely.

Sirius halfheartedly raised his eyebrows. "So why are you here so soon," he croaked, "You miss me already?"

The look on Fudge's face was replaced with utter contempt. "No. Harry Potter was found missing. He's been missing for quite a while without our knowledge. So, naturally, the ministry wants to be sure that you are still being kept in solitary confinement, safe and sound."

Sirius' blood boiled. "Safe? You call this safe?"

"No, Mr. Black." Fudge replied, peering at Sirius through the bars, "it's safe for everyone else."

Sirius glared, although he realized that this action was not as strong as it once was, as he was so weak and starved-looking now. Then he realized what Fudge had initially said. "Harry's missing?" He said, quickly.

"Yes, Black." He said, and then he puffed up a little. "And we'll be taking you in for questioning tomorrow. Just in case, you know."

Sirius inwardly rolled his eyes. It was just like Fudge to take pride in stupid things like that. He didn't believe for a second that the Ministry could possibly think that he was responsible for Harry's disappearance, it just looked better for the minister to look like he was

doing something helpful for the situation—it made him look better in the eyes of the public—and wasn't it an election year?

Sirius was about to continue talking, when idea struck him. He was silent for a second or two, half-listening to Fudge's ramble about something or coming to testify something-or-other. After a moment he knew that he couldn't be questioned. He had to find Harry.

It was amazing how such a small child could bring such joy to a man's life, even if his godson didn't know it. Heck, his godson didn't know him. How long had it been since he'd last seen Harry? Somewhere around six years now, he thought. Suddenly he was filled with longing to see the child he barely knew anymore. For a moment, Sirius was overcome with sadness. He remembered his last words to James, that night before...everything exploded. He had remembered them for six years now, and knew them by heart.

"Sirius, James said, promise you'll take care of Harry and Lily for me. If...if something ever happened to me."

"James, Sirius would always say, nothing will happen to you or Lily or Harry. You're safe, I know it. Nothing will happen. He tried to joke, to lighten up the conversation. Besides, what would me and Remie do without our number one prankster?"

But James persisted. "Promise me, Sirius. Please."

"James—"

"Please, Sirius."

"...I promise, James."

Sirius would, in his dreams, see James' face. It was always worried and full of anxiety, emotions that looked so out of place on his lighthearted friend. And Sirius would always wake up, yelling, "I promise! I promise, James!" to the cold, stone walls. The words would seem to echo in his cell, finding their way back. "I promise, I promise, I promise," as if reminding Sirius of the pledge he'd made so many years ago.

"I promise, James." He murmured to himself, and this time it didn't mimic him or echo back at his face, but instead stayed with him, like a reminder. "I promise."

"Good." Fudge was saying. "I'll return early tomorrow to collect you." And the minister turned on his fancy heels and left with a swish of his cloak, the dementor trailing swiftly behind him.

But Sirius had no intention of returning with the minister in the morning.

"I promise."

A/N: It's not quite as long, I know, but I wanted to update at least something before I left for vacation, because after this I won't be able to update for about a week and a half.

Anyway, thanks to all my reviewers, and everyone press the purple button down there!

Moonfyre

Three – Running and Some Luck

(November 30, 1987, late morning)

"Now would be a really great time to come and rescue me, Dev..." Harry muttered aloud as he raced down the crowded London streets, his backpack clutched firmly in one hand. He swung it around onto his back as he dodged and darted, moving in and out of people as though they weren't even there. It was so simple. He'd done it a thousand times.

Unfortunately, the simplicity didn't last long.

"Hey! Stop him!" His pursuer shouted as he chased the dark-haired boy. The sound was half-lost among the chattering people. The half of the crowd that actually heard the man's plea looked around wildly but saw no threat, no one rushing away from a murder scene or dashing off with some old lady's purse. Luckily for Harry, all they could make out was a little boy who quickly disappeared among the other shoppers.

And although Harry would never admit it, his height (or lack thereof) was also quite lucky. Being surrounded by the taller and wider adults made it much more difficult for him to be found...

"Get back here!"

...but apparently not that difficult. The man was right behind him and quickly gaining, and as Harry sped up a bit, he couldn't quite resist the urge to turn around to see how close the man was.

He could see his pursuer's face as he threw out obscenity after obscenity. "You insolent little—!" the man yelled. Harry winced and quickly turned back around to face the front just in time to catch his left arm on the corner of a souvenir stand. He yelped in pain as the table turned over, sending glass figurines crashing to the ground, hats and clothes flying all over, and silvery necklaces skittering across the pavement. He momentarily tripped over a stray hat, regained his balance, gave the lady in charge of the stand a quick apology and raced off after hearing the colorful phrases she yelled

after him. His pursuer fell to the ground, righted himself, and continued pursuit.

Does this guy ever give up? Harry thought to himself. He must be either dense, demented, or an early-morning jogger...The pair ran on as though demons were nipping at their very heels, with the man constantly gaining now that the heavy crowds were beginning to thin out.

As Harry rounded a corner, he met a very welcome and familiar sight: a large brown dog was waiting right in front of him, so close that the boy had to stop short to make sure he didn't run into it. "It's about time!" Harry exclaimed. If dogs were able to lift one eyebrow, it would have. Unfortunately, it had to settle for a short bark.

The pursuer, sped up and half-grinned, half-grimaced. "This is the last time you'll steal from me, you runt," he said between gasps. He rounded the corner with confidence, only to stop quickly and raise his hands with his palms outwards. After all, staring at a very large dog that looked as though it wanted to eat him alive didn't do much for one's confidence level. The dog bared its teeth and growled, clearly stating back off, now. "Fine, kid." The man grunted, stepping away in frustration. "You'll get yours." And, after glaring at Harry and calling the child a particularly nasty name, the man ran off as fast as he possibly could.

After a moment, Harry massaged his arm and said shyly, "Thanks, Dev. That was great. We're getting really good at this." The dog barked in the affirmative, and the pair walked off down the street.

Meanwhile, a bit farther off, another dog was hurrying along the sidewalk. Stupid drivers, Sirius cursed inwardly for the fourth time, after nearly being mowed over by a blue van. Honestly. You'd think they'd never seen a dog cross the street before!

It had been nearly twenty-four hours since he'd escaped Azkaban. He was pleased to find out (and thank whatever gods there were that he could finally show his pleasure as much as he wanted without it being sucked up) that his idea had worked just the way he'd planned. He had theorized, long before Fudge's visit, that the dementors could not

sense his feelings when he was in dog form. At least, not as well as when he was an average homo sapien. After much thought, and a pull from the half-trance he'd been in for years, all he had done was make a quick slip through the cell door (and he was surprised at his own speed after six years of being cramped up in a tiny stone room) when the dementors brought him his food, and he just bolted.

To be utterly and completely honest, he'd had no earthly idea where he was going. The choices he'd made were random, no more premeditated than the toss of a coin. Halfway down the cold corridors, an alarm of some sort had started to echo throughout the castle. He cursed frantically and had started to run twice as fast, not really knowing if he could even manage to get out. After a few nasty run-ins with various dementors, he found himself outside all at once, breathing in the fresh air; as he splashed into the icy sea water that was freezing because of the harsh winter air, he'd realized that even the bitter water was better than Azkaban's chill.

And a half-eaten hamburger and some public fountain water later, he was feeling better and his fur had lost its sickly sheen.

But actually finding his godson was a different story.

He obviously wasn't with the Dursleys, since that was sure to be the first place the Ministry had looked. And Dumbledore, most likely, had figured out that it would be smart to check nearby orphanages. Which left two possibilities in Sirius' mind.

Firstly, Harry could be living with someone as an unofficial adopted child. This didn't seem very likely, as Sirius was pretty sure Harry had run away from the Dursleys (And he, Sirius, didn't blame his godson in the least), or else they had dropped him off somewhere and "forgotten" to pick him up. It was disgusting that the only blood-relatives Harry had would treat him like dirt and abandon him. Lily hadn't said much about the subject, but it was evident that her sister wouldn't care in the least about her nephew.

The second possibility was that Harry could be living on the streets. This seemed like the more likely prospect, but it meant that Sirius had a heck of a lot more searching to do.

But this possibility also unearthed another one. One that Sirius was trying to push out of his mind. He knew that Harry could have been on the streets for a long time, and he wished Fudge would have given him more information. Not many full-grown people could unexpectedly learn to adapt to life on the streets, and it was probably tough to be a seven-year-old with nowhere to go.

Sirius shuddered, and tried to stop letting his imagination run away with him. He kept seeing images of Harry – Harry alone, Harry freezing cold, Harry hurt, Harry lying dead—blurred images, though they were. He didn't even really know how Harry looked now. Did he still look like James? Did he act like Lily, then, since all he externally had from her were his eyes? Was his hair still messy? It was definitely the last image that frightened him most – even more going back to Azkaban. The fear that he would not be able to fulfill James' wish for Harry to have a good life. That he would fail the memory of his best friend. The fear that he would be too late, that the last Potter would be gone.

And it was this fear that Sirius was currently trying to shove to the back of his head (not that he was succeeding, mind you) as he walked down the street, and noticed something odd out of the corner of his eyes. There seemed to be some sort of disturbance across the street. People were dropping packages and hurrying out of the way of someone. He was just about to ignore it and keep walking when he saw him.

The disturbance was just a little boy. A little boy with a skinny frame, a lightning-bolt scar, and messy black hair that bounced up and down wildly in the air as he ran. His eyes were a glittering emerald, and they danced all over, looking for openings in the sea of people through which he could pass. A little farther down the street was a man who was making, if possible, even more of a disturbance than the boy by crashing all about and pushing people to the side. It was obvious that the man was chasing the little boy for some reason or another, and the child seemed to know he was in trouble, as he glanced back at his pursuer with fear in his eyes.

There was no doubt about it. If anyone was Harry, it was him.

Sirius gave a yelp of shock, which came out as a loud bark, as he was in dog form. A few people jumped and one even dropped her shopping bag, but Sirius ignored them as he darted across the street as though his life depended on it.

He barked loudly, but if either the man or boy heard him, they didn't show it. Besides, he thought, it wasn't like they'd stop even if they had.

As Harry approached one of the busier streets, he hurriedly looked both ways and began to cross the street, dodging a car that honked its horn at him.

The boy made it safely to the other side of the street and Sirius was just catching up to him, and he breathed in deeply through his nose, catching a whiff of Harry's scent. He was now almost close enough to his godson's pursuer to bite his leg or stop him.

He was halfway across the street and had almost caught up with them when, as it does in most stories, fate intervened.

Tires squealed, someone screamed, and Sirius jumped backwards just in time to see a van whiz past. Stupid drivers...he thought again in anger as he looked about wildly for his godson.

The crowds were around him everywhere, pushing past him as he spun about and tried to locate the little boy. He pushed his nose close to the ground and sniffed hurriedly, but the smells of the city were too much: popcorn, gasoline, rats, animals, people, perfume, food—there were too many smells, and in the back of his mind he knew that he had missed his chance.

Harry was gone.

A/N: Another short chapter...sorry guys! I just got back from vacation, and I wanted to put something up, no matter how short it was...

Anyway, thanks a bunch to all my reviewers, because you all kept me going...I hope to put another chapter up very soon, but if you review I might just put it out quicker!

Thanks a bunch,

moonfyre

Four—Quiet

(December 1, 1987, late evening)

Harry switched the flashlight on and off again, occasionally making finger puppets dance around or chase each other on the wall. He sat on a beaten and old mattress that looked as though it had seen better days, and Devlin lay sprawled beside him, head resting on *The Hobbit*, which Harry had finished a long time ago – he was almost finished the Lord of the Rings trilogy. The dog was looking on boredly as Harry played with the light. They were in an old, rundown building that had once been a rather small library. Shelves still stood row by row, eerily devoid of books or anything else with the exception of Harry's few belongings. The room was wide and dark, and the flashlight threw shadows across the walls and made strange shapes dance over the bare floors. Harry and Devlin had set up their home near a rather large window from which most of the light in the room usually came. On this particular evening, however, it was cloudy and dark outside. Rain plummeted from the clouds, hitting the cement pavement outside with such force that Harry had opted to stay inside in the hopes that it would eventually let up. No such luck, though. The rain stopped them from going out again to get something to eat, and they were nearly out of food.

Harry sighed and put the flashlight aside. “I’m bored.” he said aloud. Devlin nuzzled Harry’s hand in an attempt to get the boy to scratch his head. The child automatically did so, and Devlin’s tail wagged furiously. “We may as well rest though, I suppose,” he told Dev, “so we’ll be awake earlier tomorrow to get some food.” He lay back on the mattress, and Devlin pulled a shabby, threadbare blanket onto his friend. “Thanks,” Harry murmured as Devlin curled up behind him to make a giant, furry pillow.

The dog was asleep and snoring in what seemed like an instant. Wow, Harry mused enviously. He always falls asleep so fast...

The raven-haired child reached a hand up to stroke Devlin’s thick fur. It had been a day like this. It had been cold and wet and dark, the day he’d met Devlin.

Devlin had practically saved his life. The streets hadn't been treating him too well before. Harry had quickly been introduced to the unappealing side of street life: hunger, thirst, sickness, always running away, and, worst of all (in Harry's opinion), gangs. There weren't many gangs where Harry was, but there were enough to make him afraid whenever he was alone, enough to make him look over his shoulder and jump at the slightest sound. He was lucky that he was quick on his feet, for he had been cornered only once and had been fortunate enough to escape from the encounter with just a few scratches. After that, though, he was terrified of them. All of those people staring at him, leering, grinning. Leaning forwards with a knife in hand, laughing when he flinched away or whimpered.

He had been alone, and afraid, and he hated himself for it. He hated being afraid, but it seemed to Harry that he always would be afraid of something, that he would never be safe. Uncle Vernon terrified him, and so did the streets. There was nowhere else to turn.

And then he met Devlin. While the dog hadn't miraculously made everything perfect, Harry could see that things were looking up. Devlin was fiercely loyal to Harry; the dog protected him from gangs, shopkeepers, and anything else. It seemed that the dog had unofficially adopted the boy, something for which Harry was grateful. And on top of that Devlin had become Harry's very best friend. His only friend.

Harry smiled happily, little fingers still playing with Dev's dark fur. He was hardly ever lonely anymore, thanks to his dog. It was like having a loyal and trustworthy friend, a confidant who would never tell a soul what his boy said, and a brave protector all rolled into one.

Of course, saying that Devlin was the solution to all of his problems was a bit untruthful. There was always one thing that Harry had wanted his whole life, one thing Harry longed for with all his heart: a family. Devlin seemed to know, at times, that he wasn't providing everything Harry needed, and he would curl up across Harry's lap (for the dog was so large that he could hardly fit in his little charge's lap) and lick Harry's hand.

But a family was one thing Harry knew he'd never have. Most of the time he was quite alright without one, but other times the sight of other families would make him feel small and sad and unwanted. After all, it wasn't as though the Dursley's had wanted him, so why would anyone else?

The flashlight flickered and died beside him; Harry jumped and then calmed himself, allowing his eyes to adjust to the darkness. He continued to stroke Devlin's fur, thinking to himself, and he didn't fall asleep until late into the night.

A/N: Yes, I know, it's another short chapter—don't kill the author, please! I'll have another up in the next few days, I swear!

Reviews would make me go faster!

Moonfyre

Five – The Boy in the Window

(December 3, 1987)

“Nothing at all at Grimmauld Place,” Remus reported gloomily as he stepped out of the brilliant emerald flame that suddenly appeared in the fireplace at Dumbledore’s office. Ever since Sirius...since Black escaped from Azkaban, the searching for Harry had doubled. It felt like the millionth time in the last few days that he had come back only to give more bad news. The elderly headmaster, who had been sitting calmly behind his desk, simply nodded as though he had presumed as much all along. Arabella was sitting in a chair just in front of the desk, leaning back with her arms folded across her chest. The look on her face showed that she hadn’t had much luck convincing Fudge that a few more people could be spared to help with the search. As Remus was to find out later, the minister had given a ridiculous excuse as to why he couldn’t help more. Everyone had suspected as much, however: Fudge wasn’t too keen to look as though he was following Dumbledore’s orders. The muggles had been alerted, of course, but that was all he had done.

“A few of us looked through the entire house twice,” Remus said to Dumbledore, who nodded. “We knew from the beginning that we probably wouldn’t find much, if anything...there was years’ worth of dust all over...”

“Remus, my boy,” Dumbledore said, “You’re helped the searching more than you know, simply by being there. Your knowledge of your...former friend has proved to be quite helpful.” The werewolf nodded. “We are, of course, doing everything in our power to find Sirius and Harry. But I must ask: is there anywhere else, anywhere at all that they might be?”

Remus sighed, his mind beginning to buzz. Where else? They had searched everywhere: The Potters’ old house where Sirius had once lived with James after he couldn’t stand his own family any longer, Grimmauld Place today, where they had found no signs that anyone had been around recently, and a number of the Black family mansions. Remus was fresh out of ideas. And they might be running

out of time, if Sirius hadn't hurt Harry already...or worse. He sighed in frustration. "Nowhere, sir. I can't think of anywhere at all."

Dumbledore's eyes flickered. "Is there anyone or anything that could have helped Sirius along? Something that would have allowed him to keep hidden thus far?"

Remus blinked and shifted guiltily, uncomfortably aware that both the headmasters' and Arabella's eyes were fixed on him. Does he know? Remus wondered, as he had many times over the years. Does he know that they were animagi? He hated this, hated the fact that he had once betrayed Dumbledore's trust. He couldn't just tell the headmaster that he had illegally led three of his students, two of whom had died at the hands of the third, to become animagi at a record-breaking age. The man had done so much for him. Dumbledore had given Remus something he'd never had before: friends. True friends who would stand by him and help him, even after they had found out what a dark, loathsome creature he was. How could he let the headmaster know that, even after all the rules the elderly man had broken for him, he had betrayed the man anyway?

But it doesn't matter, Remus realized fiercely, because Harry's in trouble. Under any other circumstances I never would have told, but now...James' little boy, the one who looked so much like his father, like Remus' best friend. The adorable little child with Lily's eyes. How could anyone want to hurt him? he thought to no one in particular. And Sirius isn't my friend any longer. By keeping this a secret, I'll only be protecting him. I'll have to tell. For Harry's sake.

Remus looked up into the headmaster's blue eyes with determination, determination to find the ebony-haired child that he had once loved as much as he would his own son. "Sirius is an animagus," he said firmly. "He's a huge black dog that looks like..."

...a grim, Harry thought as he sat near a window in a small ice cream parlor, licking an ice cream cone. That dog looks just like a grim. His emerald eyes followed a rather large black dog with matted fur and a strange, forced gait, who sat down on a corner across the street near the traffic light that currently read DON'T WALK. Almost as if it were waiting for a break in the traffic. Harry licked the side of his hand after

a drip of chocolate ice cream fell onto it, ignoring the dog in favor of the present food emergency.

He and Devlin were regulars here, although Devlin was back at the library at the present moment. It was the only ice cream place they knew of where dogs were allowed, and the ice cream was pretty good, making it one of their favorites. They came to eat here so often that Harry knew most of the employees by name. At first, the workers hadn't been too keen on having a dog so large in the shop, but Devlin was so polite and well behaved that they didn't seem to mind anymore. The dog usually just sat on the floor, waiting for Harry to give him a lick of the ice cream cone.

Technically, the ice cream Harry was presently eating was stolen, as he had pick-pocketed a tourist and gotten a pretty decent bit of cash. Harry didn't particularly care how illegal his food was, though. Ice cream was ice cream after all.

Harry glanced back at the dog. It hadn't moved.

Another reason Harry often came for ice cream was to watch the people go by. It was funny, actually: all sorts of people walked up and down the street. Big ones, little ones, white ones, black ones, brown ones, fat ones, skinny ones, old ones, young ones. Everyone bustling as though their life was extremely important, as though no one else mattered. People ran quickly to reach places on time and sped past in new cars...sometimes Harry wondered if it was really his life that was horrible and not theirs. He sometimes pitied the people who rushed past the window, and watched them in amusement. The raven haired boy felt lucky, at times, not to be living like them. He never had to rush anywhere. No one was expecting him. He didn't have to pay for anything, and he didn't have a fancy new car or a huge mansion. And in the end, he found that he didn't mind in the least.

But it was the times when he saw families go past that made his heart twinge. He wouldn't mind putting up with the hustle and bustle and stress of normal life if he had someone to share all everything with. Someone who cared about him.

But the black dog broke through Harry's thoughts. It apparently saw a break in the traffic, as it began to cross the street cautiously. Funny, Harry thought as he realized that the light now read WALK. Almost as though it can read...It was in the middle of the street when its eyes fell on Harry and it stopped as though frozen solid. The boy just stared at it, only dimly aware that his ice cream was beginning to drip all over his hands. After a moment, a car honked at the dog and snapped it out of its daze. It barked indignantly, as though it was right and the blue sedan was wrong, and crossed the street. It continued to walk forward with its eyes on Harry the entire time, until it disappeared from sight.

That was strange. Harry said as he went back to the brown mess that was his ice cream. He paused. That dog's as smart as Devlin is. He regarded the spot where the dog had disappeared for a moment more, but nothing popped out at him, and the questions in his mind remained unanswered.

"Hello, Har – I mean, kid. Mind if I sit here?"

Harry jumped and nearly dropped his ice cream cone. He looked up quickly. The stranger was tall and thin, with long, dark, tangled hair and blue eyes. The corners of his mouth were slightly twisted upwards, as though he were trying and failing to hide a smile of relief. His clothes were shabby and torn, as if he had come a long way. And he looked Harry up and down as if he, Harry, was an old friend that the man hadn't seen in a very long time. Harry finally caught his breath, but his eyes were narrowed. He wasn't as dumb as he looked. Just because he was only seven didn't mean that he'd missed the stranger's slip up. Besides, it wasn't every day that an adult asked to sit with him, and this made Harry nervous, though he refused to show it on the outside. The raven-haired boy couldn't help but wonder if the man was another shopkeeper he'd ticked off one too many times who recognized him, but no...he probably would have remembered the man. There was something strange about him, something different but distinctly familiar.

He nodded hesitantly, and the man sat down.

"So, what's your name?" the stranger asked.

But you know it already, thought Harry. The boy quickly asked, "What's yours?"

The stranger looked taken aback, and he regarded Harry thoughtfully for a moment. "I'm Sirius," he said, sticking out a hand for Harry to shake.

"Harry," the boy said as he took the hand with his sticky fingers. The man, Sirius, looked amusedly at his own hand, which was now sticky as well. The stranger wiped the mess onto his dirty clothes, looking as though he didn't quite know what to say.

Harry solved his problem. "Why are you sitting with me?" he blurted out. The stranger looked surprised, and Harry shyly added, "I mean, you don't usually sit with people you don't even know."

Sirius smiled at the addition and said, "I don't know. I guess...you looked lonely. Don't you have anyone you can come here with?"

Harry shrugged. "My dog Devlin isn't here, and he usually comes with me everywhere." The man looked at Harry with something akin to approval, and the boy took another lick of his ice cream and stuck a hand in his pocket to fish for something. He pushed down the folded money that he had stolen and took out a picture instead. It was of Devlin and Harry, taken by a photographer who appeared to be taking pictures of random people on the street. The man had used an instant camera, and had taken two pictures, one for himself and one for Harry. In the photo, Harry was leaning against the side of a building and looking down at Devlin. He had one hand in the pocket of his gray jacket, and the other was scratching the dog's head. Devlin's eyes were looking upwards with happiness, and Harry was laughing at the dog's expression. He showed it to Sirius, trying to make conversation. "See? That's him. He looks kind of like this black dog that just crossed the street. It was sort of funny, actually...like it could read." He looked back at the street as though expecting to see the dog standing somewhere, and he missed the stranger's amused look. Sirius took the photo and stared at it for a moment before his brow furrowed. He blinked, shook the picture, and stared at it again as though expecting to see something that wasn't there.

"What's wrong?" Harry asked, bewildered. Sirius froze, and he looked as though he had remembered something a bit too late.

"Nothing." the man said quickly, returning the photo to Harry, who slowly shoved it back in his pocket. "Look...Harry..." Sirius began, shifting uncomfortably in his seat. He glanced at Harry with pleading eyes. "I...I don't know how to begin, or how to tell you, but –"

There was a sharp intake of breath and a crash. Harry and the stranger both spun around to see a waitress in front of them (Mary Kay was her name, if Harry remembered correctly) who was looking fearfully at the older man. She had dropped an ice cream sundae on the ground and it was splattered all over her shoes, but she didn't appear to have noticed. She pointed a finger at Sirius, and opened and closed her mouth a few times as though she couldn't get any words out. Then, she finally did. "You! You're that – that man!"

"Harry," Sirius whispered urgently, and Harry turned back around to look at him. The man's eyes still held that pleading sort of look. "I haven't got time to explain, but I know you. Please, meet me somewhere tomorrow...at that marketplace, the one that's a couple of blocks away, maybe, I don't know. At five o' clock?" Harry was vaguely aware that the waitress had hurried over to a phone on the wall and was dialing a number. By this point, nearly everyone had realized that Sirius was That Man, whatever it meant, and they were hurrying away as fast as they could go. People were panicking and rushing outside, telling other people to get away from the store. Something about a murderer. Harry stared at the man, still frozen. Sirius made a face, seeming to debate something inwardly. He had stood up, but was hesitating. The waitress was yelling something into the phone, something about policemen, people were yelling, an alarm had started to go off. But Sirius seemed to know that Harry needed an extra push, and he finally gave in and leaned close to the boy and whispered something into his ear, something that Harry heard despite all of the noise and panic: "You're my godson."

Harry's jaw dropped open and he continued to stare as Sirius straightened and began to run. "Be there!" he said desperately, letting out a curse that Harry knew he probably wasn't supposed to hear. He

ran towards the door with a stiff, forced gait, as though he had not walked on his own feet in a very long time.

Harry dropped his ice cream into a trash can as he hurried away from the shop as fast as he could. What was that? he asked himself. Could he really be...my godfather? How does he expect me to believe him all of a sudden when he doesn't explain anything? And how does that lady know him? Why did he run? Questions spiraled through his head as he rushed away from the shop. She looked scared. And she...wait! She was shouting about policemen... His godfather might be a criminal! The whole thing had been strange, but Sirius's hurried departure was the strangest of all. And as much as Harry hated to admit it, he had to meet Sirius at the marketplace tomorrow. Sirius was the only one who could answer his questions.

An idea finally pieced itself together in Harry's head, and he suddenly stopped short, causing someone behind him to run into his back. He apologized quickly and moved aside, close to a building to allow people to walk past him. "No way..." he whispered to himself.

But it made sense. Sirius' strange clothes, weird looks, and shaking the picture because it wasn't moving...Sirius was a wizard. And he'd probably done time: the waitress' reaction to seeing him proved it. Maybe I'm jumping to conclusions, Harry thought, but it does make sense.

"This puts a new twist on things..."

A/N: There you go! I told you I'd have it up in a few days...I'd hoped it would be longer, because I know I usually like reading longer chapters, but I can never seem to sit myself down and write long chapters. I'm too undisciplined!

Anyway, huge thanks go out to all of my reviewers: you guys are awesome, and if it hadn't been for you I probably would have lazily waited to finish this chapter in a week or so instead of in a few days...so thanks for everything!

moonfyre

Review!

Six—A Somewhat Odd Conversation and Discoveries

(November 10, 1987, late evening)

Devlin was asleep on the mattress and snoring when Harry crept in through the window. It had taken him quite a while to get back, partly because the library was so far away from the hustle and bustle of shops and crowds – it had only been an old, small, corner library after all – and partly because Harry had chosen to take the long way instead of using all of the side streets and back alleys that he knew. He fell out of the window with an ungraceful thud, stood up, brushed himself off, and heaved all his strength into closing the rusty window frame.

He then quickly focused on waking up the only person—if you could call Devlin a person—he could talk to. “Devlin! Devlin, wake up!” Harry said, shaking the large dog. Devlin jumped and woke almost at once, ears perked up with no sign of being tired. He looked at Harry curiously. “Devlin, I met...I met this guy when I went for ice cream. He was really strange—weird clothes, walked funny, shook up that picture of me and you—blue eyes, black hair...Devlin, I think he was a wizard!” The dog’s eyes narrowed a bit and it growled. “Well, so am I!” Harry said, pretending to be indignant. The dog looked apologetically at its boy.

“That’s not all, anyway—he said he knew me! He said I was...his godson. And plus, I think he’s been in prison. And recently, too. And I think he broke out of prison. Mary Kay—that waitress from the ice cream place, remember?—she went all funny when she saw him and she rushed to the phone. It must have been the police, because the guy got out as fast as he could.” Devlin cocked his head to one side, as though processing this information. “Well, what do you make of it?” Harry asked after he could take the silence no longer. Devlin snorted, shaking his brown head a little. Harry sighed and said, “Well, it doesn’t matter anyway, because he told me to meet him tomorrow at 5 o’clock.”

Devlin’s ears shot up and he glanced at Harry. “You don’t have a say in it. Just because you don’t trust wizards doesn’t mean I can’t. I am a

wizard after all, right?" Harry stood up and began to change for bed. Devlin barked at his young charge, who said, "I'm going, and that's all there is to it." Harry hesitated and said softly, "And there are so many questions I have for him. I want to know if my parents were wizards as well, and if they...loved me." The boy continued to change into some worn out pajamas, obviously lost in thought.

The dog looked a bit sad for a moment; he walked up and nudged the boy on his bare leg. Harry winced at the dog's cold nose, but then rubbed Devlin's head affectionately and said, "If this gets me into trouble because Sirius—that's his name, or at least that's what he told me—because he's on the run, then I'll tell you I was wrong and you were right and you can laugh at me all you like. Fair?" The dog made a sort of cross between a humph and a sigh. Harry didn't notice, or at least he pretended not to.

"Besides," the boy said softly, almost to himself as he fumbled with the edge of his shirt. "I trust him. I'm not sure...why, exactly. But I do."

The dog looked at the boy with an unreadable expression on its face and bit the bottom of his shirt, tugging him over to the mattress.

"Alright. I'm coming." Harry flopped onto the mattress, and Devlin curled up behind him to make a pillow. Harry rested his head on Devlin's soft fur and pulled the blanket over the both of them. Within a few moments, the boy's breathing slowed and became steady and rhythmic, and Devlin knew he was asleep.

The dog regarded the boy with a mixture of compassion and protectiveness, and nosed a bit of hair out of the child's face. Nothing, Devlin knew, would hurt the child as long as he was there. The dog would most definitely be with the boy tomorrow when he went to see this...this...wizard. Devlin settled deeper into the mattress, careful not to disturb his boy, as he decided that Harry would not get out of the library without Devlin. Even though the dog's instinct was to stay as far away from most wizards as possible, his instinct to guard and protect Harry was much stronger.

That wizard would have a hard time hurting his boy. Just let him try.

(November 11, 1987, morning)

"Professor Dumbledore!"

The aforementioned person, along with Remus and Arabella, looked up to see a very frazzled looking Arthur Weasley walk into Dumbledore's office. His red hair was disheveled and he appeared to be quite out of breath. Kingsley Shacklebolt was at his side, and he didn't seem to be any better.

"What is it?" Remus spoke immediately.

"Black's been sighted," Shacklebolt said. "He was in a shop in London. Apparently one of the waitresses saw him and called the police. Fudge found out from the muggle minister. He's been talking about it and shouting orders for a while, but he hasn't said anything about telling you."

Dumbledore nodded, "It seems that he would like to gain the attention of the wizarding public and show that he doesn't need any help," the headmaster said softly. "I suppose it would look rather bad for him to appear to rely on me. Nevertheless," he added when he saw Remus' fidgeting, "was Harry with him?"

"More than likely," Shunpike said slowly. "The workers said that there was a boy there, and they've seen him around before. One of them said that she remembered his name was Harold or Henry or something like that, but both of them cleared out before the please-men showed up."

Remus' mind was reeling. He had been discussing their options, or lack thereof, with Dumbledore only a moment ago, and now it seemed that they could easily be on Sirius' tail. The headmaster had almost immediately forgiven him for leading his friends to become animagi (the werewolf felt as though Dumbledore had most likely known it all along), and Bella had suggested that they see if any strays had been seen throughout the London area that matched Remus' description of Sirius. Dumbledore was insisting on telling the ministry about Sirius' animagus form (much to Bella's disapproval), saying that the more eyes looking out for Sirius and Harry, the better.

"Search the area," Dumbledore said to the Auror, "and bring Severus and Minerva with you. Remus and Arabella, you should go as well...and gather anyone else you can find." The Aurors nodded and stepped into the fireplace, with Remus and Arabella following close behind.

Things were definitely looking up.

While Remus was thinking about Sirius, the sky was darkening in London. It was about an hour's walk from the parlor that the prison escapee and his godson had been spotted earlier. Clouds poured in from the west and covered the entire sky, thickening and shifting, threatening to send white flakes down to the ground for the first time that winter. Blue eyes regarded the clouds, half of him resigned to the fact that the alley he'd been sleeping in might be even colder than usual that night, and half of him pleading with the clouds to wait. Sirius' thoughts, however, were on another subject altogether, and it wasn't overly difficult to guess what.

Finding Harry had been much different than he had expected. His mind had still invented all sorts of possibilities for Harry's current state, regardless of the fact that he had gotten a glimpse of the boy running away. He imagined a Harry who was sick from the constant cold, a Harry who was hurt from life on the streets, a lost and friendless Harry, a cold, distant Harry whose life had made him angry with the world. On the other hand, he'd imagined a Harry with a family who had adopted him and loved him, a Harry who had someone to care for him. A Harry who didn't need Sirius' help. The animagus couldn't tell which kind of Harry was worse. Sirius had often pushed these thoughts out of his head, trying to focus on the task at hand instead of wondering what his godson was going through, but it usually didn't work.

He had been only half alert when he had accidentally spotted Harry in the ice cream parlor; the other half of his mind was thinking up new possibilities (a Harry that had, since Sirius saw him last, traveled far away from London...to America, perhaps, where Sirius and Dumbledore and the Ministry might never find him. Sirius had to admit, he might have been overreacting. Harry was only seven, after

all). His body had been on autopilot, eyes watching for an opening in the traffic, and then his legs moved across the street of their own accord.

And then, halfway there, it happened. He looked up, and his godson was sitting in a small ice cream shop with a chocolate ice cream cone that was leaking down his hands, staring back at him. There was no mistaking the ebony locks that stuck up messily in the back, the lightning bolt scar, and the emerald green eyes that looked at him curiously. Sirius stared at him for a moment, standing in the middle of the street as though he had been petrified. Harry didn't look away, choosing to simply stare back in the blunt, defiant way that children did.

A loud noise had startled Sirius into moving again: a car was honking at him. The animagus stood tall and gathered his dignity back, barking at the sedan as though all of his problems were its fault. He crossed the rest of the way and ducked behind the building to transform, and then he went in to meet his godson.

Harry was...different than anything that Sirius had imagined, and the entire time that he talked to the child, he couldn't help but wonder how the boy's life had been since Sirius had seen him last. Harry wasn't too shy, but he wasn't exactly outgoing either. He looked at his godfather suspiciously when the man sat down, but Sirius expected that it had something to do with the whole "don't talk to strangers" thing. After a moment, Harry seemed to have warmed up to Sirius a bit and was showing him a picture of what was apparently his dog, Devlin. Sirius looked at the boy in approval and a bit of amusement after the child mentioned that the dog usually went everywhere with him. The kid definitely had good taste in pets.

He was momentarily stumped when the raven-haired child handed him the photo – he couldn't figure out why the images weren't moving—and most likely confused his godson by shaking the picture violently to get the figures to move around a bit. Harry's look of utter surprise made him stop in mid-shake as he remembered that muggle photos didn't move.

And then, the waitress had come and ruined it all. Sirius had had just enough time to whisper to Harry that he, Sirius, was his godfather and that the child should come meet him at a nearby marketplace the following day before he rushed away hurriedly. The muggle law enforcers would be there in a few moments, most likely. News would spread to the muggle minister, and from the muggle minister to Fudge, and from Fudge to Dumbledore. Everyone would be after him soon enough. He'd need a good, crowded place to meet Harry, a place where he could disguise himself and blend in.

But Sirius, surprisingly, wasn't quite as worried as he thought he'd be. He was excited about really, truly getting to know his little godson, the child who looked so much like James that it almost knocked the breath out of him. As he huddled and shivered in the small, quickly darkening alley, his eyes were bright and alert.

He was getting closer. Soon he and Harry would be together, and he could give his godson the life James had wanted him to have.

He wasn't sure if he was ready, and he wasn't sure if he was made out for taking care of himself and a seven-year-old boy. But neither Harry nor Sirius had much to lose, and if Harry was willing to take a leap of faith and trust Sirius to care for him, Sirius would be more than willing enough to do it.

The only question was, what if Harry didn't want to trust his godfather?

A/N: I know, I know, this chapter is kind of slow, and I know you were all waiting for Harry to meet Sirius, but the meeting is next chapter. I'm sorry!

Anyway, please review! It's like food to me, and without food I'll die, and if I die you get no more chapters!

Moonfyre

Seven—A Rainy Reunion

(December 4, 1987, afternoon)

Harry walked steadily through the crowd at the marketplace, with Devlin following behind him so closely that the ebony-haired child could feel the dog's nose bump against his back every now and then. As far as Harry could tell, just about everything in the square was on sale, from fresh produce to new clothes to bracelets and earrings to furniture. People around him laughed and bought and sold and talked and played, and everyone seemed to be in a cheery mood, despite the gloomy weather.

The sky was gray and threatened to spill its rain or snow—no one was quite sure which it would be. The clouds had been covering the sun all day long, and as a result it was even colder than usual. People were bundled up thickly, some carrying raincoats or umbrellas, just in case. Harry's own clothes were lacking in warmth, however. He wore only a shirt with a light jacket and jeans. He had managed to find two rather worn-out scarves when he searched the bottoms of various dumpsters and trash cans, and he kept the shabbier one for himself and let Devlin have the other, as Harry felt that his friend should have something to help himself keep warm.

It seemed to Harry as though his entire world had been flipped upside down and inside out. As though he was standing frozen while people pushed past him; as though the world was going on and he was stuck somewhere, watching it pass him by. He felt scared...although that was no surprise. Fear was an emotion Harry felt very often, but it usually bubbled up at times when Devlin wasn't around to protect him. He hadn't been this afraid or nervous since before he'd left the Dursleys over a year ago. He wasn't quite sure what to expect, but he was positive by now that things would change soon.

As he made his way past a stand selling oddly-shaped silvery trinkets, Harry couldn't help but wonder what Sirius wanted. Alright, Harry told himself, so you've got a godfather. Deal with it. There are more important questions that need to be answered. Like, what now? What did Sirius want from him, and why had the man told Harry that he was his godfather? What was the point? Did Sirius expect something from

Harry? Would the man...possibly, maybe, take Harry with him, wherever he was going? After all, being on the run with his godfather couldn't possibly be worse than living alone on the streets, depending on his pick pocketing skills to get his next meal. What was Sirius like, anyway? Would he be kind or would he be just like the Dursleys? Harry didn't feel like he could stand it if the man turned out to be just like his aunt, uncle, and cousin, or worse. He'd probably end up running away again, only it would be much more difficult as Sirius was a wizard. Could Harry even trust Sirius? The man had been in jail once before—for what? What crime had the man committed, and was he dangerous? Harry's mind buzzed with questions, as it had been ever since his godfather had popped into his life. He massaged his cold, gloveless fingers to warm them up, realizing as he did so that there was another, more pressing question: How on earth would he find his godfather in the crowd? There were people all around him as far as he could see, and while being very small for his age enabled him to escape from pursuers quite easily, it also made it rather difficult to see anything. Most people towered a head or three above him, and all he could see in every direction was a thick wall of people, none of whom looked even remotely like his godfather.

As another thought struck Harry, he almost gave up. Sirius had escaped from a wizard prison, which was infinitely more difficult than escaping from a muggle one. From what little Harry knew of magical jails, few people, if any, ever escaped from them. This meant that news of Sirius' escape would have been all over the news; every witch or wizard in England and probably all of Europe would know about it by now. People everywhere would be on the lookout for the man. Sirius had to have some sort of disguise so he could go unnoticed. Harry sighed and stopped abruptly, causing Devlin to nearly run into him. The black dog gave a little yelp, wondering what was wrong. Harry moved to the side near a building, allowing people to pass near them. "Dev," he moaned, "We're never going to find him."

But then, he felt a hand on his shoulders and a soft voice said, "Hey, kiddo."

Sirius' spirits weren't exactly soaring as he looked about for his godson among the hordes of people. It had been stupid of him to

suggest that they meet at the marketplace—it was so hard to find anyone there—but it had been the first thing that had come to his mind. On top of his difficulty seeing over people's heads, he wasn't even positive that the child would show up. After all, it wasn't as though Sirius could honestly expect Harry to trust him right away, although he had halfway hoped that the boy would. He'd visited Harry almost every day for the first year of his life, so he had wished that the child would remember him at least a little. Although, with the fiasco at the ice cream parlor that ended in his hasty departure, he knew he really shouldn't expect much.

And then, there was a small opening in the crowd through which Sirius could see a little boy with jet black hair, leading a dog with a scarf around its neck through all the people. The animagus jumped, spirits rising, and pushed past people as quickly as he could.

"Watch where you're going!" a man yelled at him as Sirius nearly pushed him to the ground. The animagus paid him no notice, continuing instead to dodge in and out of the crowd towards his godson. Finally, he thought as he reached Harry. "Dev," Harry moaned, looking remorsefully at the dog, "We'll never find him."

Sirius grinned and put a hand on the boy's shoulder, startling him. "Hey, kiddo." He said, though it was somewhat muffled.

Harry spun around fearfully, paused, and then looked up at Sirius in surprise and amusement. I don't look that funny, the man thought, do I? He was extremely bundled up, with a thick blue jacket on and a hood that came down low. He had a red scarf that was wrapped around his nose and mouth. His eyes were barely visible, and it was hard to be heard through the scarf. He had boots on with thick bottoms to add an inch or two to his height. Without a wand, it was the best he could come up with—he did look too warm, but at least it would be difficult for anyone to recognize him.

"There is a person somewhere in all those clothes, right?" he asked quietly, clearly amused despite the fact that he looked a bit nervous. His mouth slowly twisted up into a lopsided grin—one that combined James's trademark grin and Lily's laughing smile—and his emerald eyes sparkled with mirth and a hint of something else.

Sirius laughed. "Hey, I had to come up with something to...well..." he trailed off, unsure how he should cover up his slip.

"...to disguise yourself?" Harry asked. "Because you're on the run?"

Sirius blinked. "Oh, you saw me on the muggle—on the news?"

"No. I just figured that the waitress at the ice cream place wouldn't phone the police for just anyone."

"Okay..." Sirius said, "Er, anyway, you probably think I went out and murdered people for a living, don't you?" He didn't wait for Harry to answer. "I'm on the run, and I'll admit it. There are a lot of people who want me behind bars, and even more who wish I was dead." Sirius knelt down on the cement next to Harry, "But I swear, Harry, I didn't do anything. They didn't give me a chance to explain my side of the story, honest. I was put in prison for...for killing some people. I never would have thought of doing something like that in my life, Harry, I promise you...I mean...do you trust me?"

Harry was staring at Sirius, emotions running all over his face. The boy looked away, towards the crowds, and Sirius waited for what seemed like ages while the child sorted everything out. The brown dog growled slightly and butted its head against Harry's shoulder. The boy gently pushed the dog away. "I know, Dev. Not now." The child broke into a shy smile. "I guess so."

Sirius beamed. He felt like dancing, but his thick jacket would have made it extremely difficult. Harry didn't mind that he was a "criminal", and he seemed to trust the animagus almost instinctively, which made Sirius think that Harry might have subconsciously remembered and believed in him all along. He'll have a better life with me, Sirius vowed as he watched Harry happily scratch the disgruntled dog's head. The boy was so small and thin, and even though the child was seven he looked as though he were five. His clothes were torn and old, and he shivered even with his jacket on. And he was so quiet, a trait that neither Lily nor James had. Sirius was willing to bet that the child's size and his silence were both due not only to the streets, but those Dursleys as well...He'll be better off from now on. I'll make sure

of it. He hugged his godson, and the child tensed up at Sirius' touch. Devlin growled a bit more, but then Harry relaxed into the embrace, wrapping his small arms around his godfather's waist.

When the two finally pulled apart, Sirius ruffled Harry's hair. "Let's get going, kid," he said, smiling down at the little boy.

"Okay," Harry said softly.

But then, as it does in many stories, fate stepped in. Again. It began to rain.

Harry led Sirius through the crowd, trying to make it to the library. They had decided to get there and figure everything out where it was drier. The rain was falling hard, pelting the sidewalks and the people below quite loudly. Lightning flashed and thunder boomed within a second. The storm was here, and it was violent.

Devlin hurried alongside Harry, his fur plastered to his sides as a result of the rain. Sirius jogged behind, watching as Harry led him forward or paused to remember which way he needed to go. The animagus' thick clothes had come in handy after all—he could hardly even feel the rain as it pelted him.

Harry, on the other hand, wasn't as fortunate. Within moments, his thin jacket and shirt were drenched with icy, freezing rainwater. He shook the hair out of his face and continued to run regardless of the cold.

The child watched as people hurried in every direction, trying to distract himself from the icy water. A strong wind blew at him, adding to the chill and making a few people's umbrellas turn inside out. It wasn't too long before Sirius realized what was happening. "Harry," he called over the loud patter of the rain, "Harry, stop!"

The boy slowed and stopped, turning around to face Sirius. "Wh-what?" Harry said, shivering.

Sirius looked at his godson, concerned. "You must be freezing! You'll catch a hell—heck of a cold if we keep going like this!"

"We're n-nearly th-there." Harry stammered through chattering teeth.

"Well, just the same..." Sirius hesitated, and then took off his bulky jacket. Long black hair spilled out of the hood, and his face became more visible.

Harry stared. "Wh-what if s-someone sees y-you?"

"I'll just have to take my chances, won't I?" Sirius asked cheerfully, bundling up his godson as Devlin watched distrustfully. He picked up the boy and carried him in his arms. "Besides," he added, "You're more important." Harry's eyes widened, letting Sirius know just how few people had said that to the child. "Now... tell me which way to go?"

Harry stared at the man. He would have struggled, but Sirius' heavy jacket, though warm, had effectively pinned his arms to his sides. The man had one arm under Harry's back, and the other under his knees. "Y-you'll get w-wet." Harry pointed out.

"Not so much." Sirius said, "I have more on than you did. And like I said, you're more important." Sirius began walking, aware that Harry was still staring at him. The boy snapped out of it just in time to say softly, "Left here."

And so, with Devlin following watchfully behind them, they continued through the pouring rain.

"This is a waste of time," Kingsley Shacklebolt muttered to himself as he huddled against the side of a building, rubbing his arms to keep them warm. The roof barely reached far enough over him to provide adequate protection against the rain, and he was still considerably wet despite it. Fudge had ordered a handful Aurors to watch the streets around the ice cream parlor "just in case". Like Black would come back for more ice cream, Kingsley grimaced. Nevertheless, he was stationed two streets away, watching as all the sane people with normal jobs hurried to get out of the storm with umbrellas up and raincoats on.

A large woman hurried past with thin clothes on and nothing to keep her warm; two children ran towards a side alley, sharing an umbrella. A man walked by, staring at his watch with no regard for the weather at all; a teenage couple and an older woman hurried down the street, with the woman scolding them the whole way.

And then, a warmly-dressed man walked on the other side of the street, following his little son and a dog. They stopped in the middle to discuss something (Absolute lunatics, Kingsley thought, stopping to talk in this weather!) and then the man took off his thick jacket, wrapped the boy up in it, and picked the child up. Both were completely drenched now, and they started to move again as quickly as—

Wait a second, Kingsley thought, suddenly standing straight, I've seen that man before...and that kid, he looks just like...but no, it couldn't possibly be. But it was. The child glanced at him and all at once Shacklebolt recognized the Potter child—black hair, green eyes, scar—which meant the long-haired man—and Kingsley could see it clearly now—was Sirius Black.

He drew his wand, hurrying after them as fast as he could. The rain's patter covered up the sound of his approaching footsteps, and he was able to get closer and closer, eyes on his target at all times, until the dog—Kingsley had forgotten it was there—turned about and began to bark ferociously.

As he knew it would, the sound alerted the man and his hostage and they turned around. Black got one good look at Shacklebolt, glanced at the wand, and then he turned and ran.

"Black!" Kingsley shouted, dodging the dog in favor of pursuing the criminal. "You're under arrest!" The dog followed him, barking madly.

This was the end for Black, Kingsley knew. The man was burdened with the little boy's weight, and years in Azkaban had clearly made the man run slower than he once did. It would be over soon.

A/N: Well, Harry and Sirius are together again—finally! And they've already gotten themselves into trouble...

Anyway, thanks a bunch for all of your reviews—this chapter was so hard to write I almost decided I would just procrastinate, but you guys convinced me to write it and post it—thanks for everything!

moonfyre

I mean it. Press the purple button down there. :P

Eight—Pursuit

(December 4, 1987)

The rain was painfully pelting the people on the London streets as Sirius struggled forward. Although Harry was quite light, it was awkward and difficult to run quickly with the boy in his arms, and Sirius found himself wishing that he had chosen to carry the child on his back instead. He listened for his pursuer behind him, straining to hear the man's footsteps over the patter of the rain. Thanks to his animagus form, his hearing was better than most and he estimated that the man was a good twenty-five to thirty feet away from him, but gaining steadily. Devlin was hot on his tail, barking and growling, but it didn't matter. Sirius wasn't as fast as he could be because of Harry's weight. The only other sounds Sirius could hear were his own heavy breathing, Harry's quick "Left" or "Right" or "Keep going straight," and the sound of feet splashing into puddles.

He couldn't go on like this for much longer. Carrying Harry wasn't as easy as it had been a few moments ago. He could hardly see through the heavy rain, and he was soaking wet and shivering, as Harry had been a moment ago. His legs ached from running, and his side hurt badly. After all, he hadn't had anywhere to run in six years—being in a jail cell had hardly helped his endurance. But he looked down at his little godson and was surprised to see Harry looking back at him, with fear in his brilliant emerald eyes.

He had to get Harry away.

If the child was caught, Dumbledore would give him a pat on the head, send him back to the Dursleys, and tell him to be a good little boy and not to run away again.

Whatever the Dursleys did to him, Sirius thought, putting on an extra spurt of speed, they won't do it again.

The group rounded a corner, and Sirius nearly bumped into someone—he couldn't see who. "Sorry," he panted over his shoulder as he raced on with a new passion. He dodged a few children who were splashing in mud puddles, thinking quickly. There wasn't a way

out of this. Even if they made it to the library where Harry said he lived, the Auror would be following them the whole way. Sirius' mind raced, trying to find another solution. Something. Anything. He could transform into a dog, but that would be leaving Harry behind.

There was no way out. There was nothing they could do. Sirius racked his brain, the Auror getting closer all the while, but he just kept confirming his despairing thoughts.

"Sirius," a voice said softly. Sirius looked down to see his godson looking up determinedly at him. "Do you trust me?"

Sirius' eyebrows shot up. "Of course," he wheezed, crossing a street, "Why...do you...have any ideas?"

"You know a way out, don't you? You've gotten this far without being seen. You have a way of getting away quickly, haven't you?"

"Yes," Sirius said awkwardly, not knowing how to explain his animagus form without getting into a long discussion about how magic was real.

"Use it."

"Can't," Sirius puffed heavily, "it's...a disguise, only for me. Won't...abandon you."

"I have one too. A disguise sort of...thing. Please, Sirius, put me down and get away."

"No," Sirius said firmly, "Won't—leave you."

"You said you trusted me," Harry argued with a hint of anger and desperation in his voice. "Prove it."

"No."

"Sirius, please. Do you want to get caught? I have a way of getting away too, but it only works on me." Harry paused, and then added

what he knew would be the magic words, “It’s almost like I can do...magic.”

Sirius looked down at his godson calculatingly, shocked. Could Harry really perform magic? There was always, of course, accidental magic, but no one had ever really been able to use it when they wanted to. It came in short, uncontrolled bursts. What if Sirius transformed and then Harry was caught? He couldn’t risk it.

“There’s no other way!” Harry said desperately as the man grew closer. The boy could see over Sirius’ shoulder that the man was close. Almost too close. He nudged the man gently to make sure his godfather was looking at him. “Please, trust me.”

Sirius was still thinking rapidly, trying to find another solution, anything...nothing came. And...if Harry tried...whatever he was going to do, and it didn’t work, there was a very good chance that their pursuer would chase Sirius anyway—after all, Sirius was the alleged dangerous murderer, and Harry was only a child. It was all they had. Sirius gave in. “Alright,” he sighed quietly.

“See that alleyway up ahead? Turn down it and keep running; it’s really narrow and it parts in different ways. We’ll be sure to lose him.”

“You’d better be right.” Sirius growled softly as he turned suddenly and ran down the alley.

Kingsley was debating whether or not to use spells—after all, it was muggle London and despite the rain, people were racing by on cars, bikes, and on foot, so he’d have to perform a million memory charms—when Black turned abruptly and began sprinting down an alleyway. Shacklebolt grinned. He was in luck—no one would be able to see his spells down there. This chase was as good as over as far as he was concerned.

But when he turned into the alley, all he saw was...

...nothing.

There was absolutely nothing there.

A few feet ahead, however, the alley parted. Straight, right, or left. He cursed and stood there for a moment, that blasted dog gaining on him every second, and went left.

He hurried away, trying to get as far out of range of those gleaming white teeth as he possibly could. Another fork. This time he went right.

After about five more rights and seven more lefts, he found himself on a street that was nowhere near where he started. Black and Potter were nowhere in sight.

As Kingsley Shacklebolt stood on a sidewalk cursing and kicking a trashcan, Sirius was running forward along a sidewalk with Harry not far in front of him. He was exhilarated, and as he strutted along—or as close to strutting as he could get in his dog form—all he could think over and over again was, My godson's an animagus! My godson's an animagus!

And so he was.

He was a fox, a small fox with beautiful black, silky fur that stretched from his nose almost to the end of his tail; the tip was white. He had long, pointed ears and the same emerald green eyes, although they were now slit like a cat's and had apparently come in handy in the dark alleyway, as Harry had navigated with ease and gotten them out of there in a few moments.

How on earth had Harry done it? He'd broken all records for the youngest animagus, that was for sure. If Sirius had been in human form, he would have grinned. Then again, he is a Marauder's son. And a fox almost seemed to fit his godson: small, silent, and smart. In any case, he and Harry had escaped, (no matter how strangely) and from the sound of things, Harry's dog was following close behind them.

They reached the old library not too long afterwards. It was an old, run-down building as Sirius had expected it to be, with the words GREYBROOK LIBRARY engraved on the doors. They didn't go in the front way, however, in favor of a side window. It had been left ajar,

just enough for Harry to slide in with his fox form. His godson hopped into the room, transformed, and opened the window all the way, allowing Sirius to jump in, with Devlin not too far behind. Sirius transformed and shook the rainwater out of his hair. Harry took off the bulky jacket, and Devlin shook violently, spraying water all over everything. "Dev," Harry moaned, "I'm already cold enough as it is."

Sirius could have sworn he saw the dog grin mischievously.

Harry handed the jacket back to Sirius, saying, "Thank you". Sirius nodded and looked around. The library was very small as far as libraries went. There were no lights except for the little light that came through the window. Shadows were all over the walls, and the bookshelves looked rather ominous and spooky in the inky darkness. Harry must have figured out what Sirius was thinking, because he said, "You get used to it after a while."

Sirius turned back to Harry, who was sitting down on a shabby mattress. "You," Sirius began, "You're an—"

"—animagus?" Harry asked. "No, I'm not. But you are, aren't you?"

Sirius nodded. "Yeah, I—" He stopped, staring at his godson, who wore a lopsided grin—almost a smirk—on his face. "How do you know about magic? I thought I'd have to go through the whole thing with you!"

The child simply smiled. "I just do, I'll tell you how later. But you must have escaped from Azkaban like that! I can't believe I didn't figure out how earlier, with the black dog that stopped in the middle of the street to stare at me." Harry shook his head, "That was brilliant of you." he said earnestly, "Figuring how to get out, I mean. It must have been easy to slip past the guards as a dog. And I knew you were magical after you started shaking that picture of Devlin and me."

Sirius smiled. "I've got a godson who's smarter than I am."

Harry blushed.

"Anyway," Sirius said, eyeing his tiny godson. "Back to you. If you're not an animagus, what are you?"

Harry looked away, shrugging slightly.

"What?" Sirius asked, his smile fading quickly. "What's wrong?"

"Promise...I mean, I'm not very normal, and...you won't get angry with me?" he asked quietly, still looking away from his godfather.

"Of course not!" Sirius exclaimed at once, unable to fathom being angry with his newly-found godson. "Harry, whatever it is, it's fine with me, I swear it."

Harry just nodded, as though he didn't quite believe the older man. "Sit down," he said, and Sirius sat down next to him on the mattress, watching him. "Well, I'm not an animagus, and I'm not a metamorphagus either, if that's what you're thinking—I'm pretty sure they can only turn into other people—no, it took me a really long time to figure out what I am. There hasn't been one since Merlin's time, or maybe even earlier than that, so I guess you can tell that we're rare."

"But what are you?" Sirius said, inwardly smiling at how good his godson was at trying to evade a question.

Harry raised his shoulders a little, facing Sirius almost determinedly. "A shapeshifter."

Sirius' eyebrows rose, and for a second, he expected Harry to say that he was only joking. "You're really...?"

His godson nodded.

"No way," Sirius breathed. "I thought they were just legends, or...you know, tall tales that kids tell each other when they're bored. Or the kind of story your parents would tell you before you went to sleep!"

"Like a fairy tale, only for wizards?"

"A fairy tale?" Sirius blinked. "People tell stories about fairies? They must be rather boring."

"Never mind," Harry said, hiding a smile. "I guess it's a muggle thing."

"But I can imagine how it took you so long to figure out what you were. I didn't even know shapeshifters really existed, and as far as I know there aren't any books about them."

"Right. That's what made learning to be one so difficult. I couldn't exactly get lessons if I was the only one alive. But I learned from..." Harry hesitated, and Sirius saw him glance away again. "...certain people." The animagus cocked his head thoughtfully, but he didn't interrupt.

"It's really hard," he continued, and then he was silent for moment. Sirius kept the silence, watching Harry look down at his hands. Then, "When you're an animagus, you keep your own mind. But...but when you're a shapeshifter, the animal's mind and instincts come with the package. Especially the first time. It's like...like..." he struggled to find a description that fit. "Like having someone else in your head, telling you to do stuff, I suppose...but once you shift into the animal again and again, you get better at controlling it. I'm best at being a fox, I think. It's the one I use the most..." He stopped again, gathering his thoughts. "I've tried loads of muggle animals like cats and dogs...a couple of fish and birds...a frog and some mice. Muggle pets like that. I guess it's a lot easier to turn into an animal if it's right in front of you, so turning into Devlin was the one of the first things I tried. But I can turn into snakes and lizards, too, and bugs and squirrels and stuff like that as well. It's usually only hard the first few times, because you have to keep your instincts in check, but after that it gets easier." He was still looking at his hands as he finished.

Sirius stared at Harry, in complete awe. "Harry," he breathed, "this is amazing."

Harry looked up. "You don't think I'm...strange?"

"Of course not!"

The child was silent for a moment, and then he spoke softly, almost in a whisper, "You don't think I'm a freak?...I mean, I don't know why you..."

Sirius looked horrified, and he wrapped his arms around his tiny godson, stopping the child in mid-sentence. He felt Harry stiffen for the second time that day, and decided that Harry would have to get used to being hugged and comforted often from now on. "Never," he murmured, feeling Harry gradually relax in his arms. "You hardly even know me, but I know you. You're my godson, Harry, and I'll never, ever, ever think you're a freak."

Harry was quiet for a long time, and then he leaned into Sirius's embrace, looking fairly amused. "What if I grew another arm or something?"

Sirius smiled. "Even if you grew another limb." He was silent for a moment, and had the opportunity to glance at Devlin, who was still staring at him warily. Sirius stretched his hand out slowly to scratch the dog's head, but Devlin bared his teeth slightly and the animagus drew his hand back. "Odd," he said to Harry. "I'm usually a dog person."

Harry just smiled. "Dev just takes a while to get used to new people. Once he starts to see you a lot...er, I mean, if you stay a while...he'll start to like you more."

The animagus watched as Harry looked away, towards the window.

"Anyway, Harry," Sirius said suddenly, "I was thinking that...well, after the whole thing with that Auror chasing me, I don't think it's safe here."

Harry nodded. "Okay."

"So...I know of a safe place. It's kind of far, but I think it'll be okay."

"Right." Harry said softly, dully. "When are you leaving?"

Sirius looked closely at Harry's face. "I was rather hoping...you'd come as well?" His godson's head shot up quickly, and Sirius continued, "Even though I'm on the run I...had hoped that you would, er...at least, that you would consider coming with me. I don't have much to offer, and I'm not sure we'll always be safe," he added quickly, "but I want to protect you and raise you like your parents wanted....I...will you think about it?" he asked softly.

"I will. Come with you, I mean." Harry said shyly. He heard a snort from Devlin, who was laying on the mattress. Harry shot him a look.

Sirius let out a sigh of relief he hadn't realized he'd been holding. His godson smiled up at him—a Lily smile, a soft one—with her eyes and James's hair. Harry was coming to live with him. And they were safe, at least for the time being. Sirius felt a sense of determination unlike one he had ever felt before, a determination that would not let him rest until Harry was protected.

He didn't realize that he was staring until Harry looked away shyly. Sirius cleared his throat. "Great. Anyway, it's actually your house we're going to. The Potter Safehouse. Some of your relatives built it in case a Potter was ever in trouble. And the house is just that: safe. It's unplottable, with unbreachable wards. It's even safer than my old house."

"Sounds great," Harry said, looking back at him with the same Lily smile. "When are we leaving?"

"As soon as possible."

"Okay. Tomorrow it is, then."

A/N: You have no idea how hard it was to write this chapter—I feel like I revised it a million times! I think this final result is the best revision so far, though it's far from being perfect...oh well, though, I gave it my best shot! And now you guys finally know Harry's secret!

But in other, much more important news—THE LAST BOOK IS COMING! Yay! I feel like I've been waiting for it my whole life! And the sad thing is, I have no idea what I'm going to do with myself when

I'm done reading it—I've been reading it for...what, nine years? What else can I read? What else is there to be obsessed with? My life will be pointless after Harry Potter:) Anyway, it's quite exciting/terrifying to know that by the time the next chapter is up, we can know exactly what happens with Harry and the final battle. So, all I can say is good luck to Harry, good luck getting the seventh book, and happy reading to everyone!

Anyway, I am always eternally grateful to my reviewers, especially because I made it to ONE HUNDRED REVIEWS! Cheers loudly and frightens her poor, clueless five-year-old cousin Thank you guys so, so much! You make my day! Goes off to reassure said cousin that she is not, in fact, insane

Okay, I was luckily able to get this chapter out semi-soon, but the next one might not be out for a while depending on Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows—if I've got my nose buried in there too long, the next chapter may not be out for a bit! Steps away from Black Panther-Lover who keeps tapping foot impatiently

Thanks again to everyone, and please review!

moonfyre

press the button:)

Nine—The Truth About Sirius

(November 12, 1987)

I can't believe he's gotten away again, Remus thought for the fourth time that morning. News of Sirius had reached him by six o'clock the previous evening. He couldn't believe it—Sirius had returned only two streets away from the ice cream parlor a day after he'd been sighted. It was unbelievable, especially because no one had thought Fudge knew what he was doing when the man decided to place a few Aurors around nearby streets. Of course, there was no way that Fudge could have really known that Sirius would return, but now the Minister was taking full credit, stating that he had known it all along and that he had been sure that the criminal would return to the scene of the crime.

Everyone knew it was just a fluke.

News had also come, a few moments later, that the Auror who had seen them, Kingsley Shacklebolt had seen Harry in Sirius' arms. Remus sighed. Just what he needed. As if it wasn't hard enough tracking the two of them down already, Sirius had gotten to Harry before they had. And according to Shacklebolt, the boy had looked rather content and hadn't been struggling at all. Getting Harry back would be even harder than he'd first thought now that Sirius had obviously lied to the child.

His thoughts were eventually drawn back to Dumbledore's question: Is there anywhere else, anywhere they might possibly be?

Where on earth could Sirius have possibly taken him? Remus wondered, groaning inwardly. There were a million decent places to hide, and that was only in London. Where would he go? Where was the most likely place that they would be? There had to be somewhere he was overlooking, somewhere he hadn't thought of before, somewhere he had forgotten. And Sirius could be doing awful things to Harry right now. Torturing, tormenting, killing. Hurting the only child of his best friends after he'd killed—

"Remus?" A voice inquired softly. The werewolf spun around to see Bella standing behind him, staring at him concernedly. She must have floored in a second ago when Remus hadn't been paying attention; the fire was beginning to die back down.

"Oh. Bella. I hadn't realized you were there." He said, although it was probably obvious by the way he had jumped at her voice.

Arabella looked a little guilty. "I'm sorry I dropped in like that, but I wanted to see how you were. You left so quick this morning after..." She trailed off.

"It's alright, it isn't as though I was doing anything important."

There was a silence for a moment in which Remus realized that he hadn't seen Arabella Figg in a very long time. As one of Lily's best friends from Hogwarts, Bella had visited Godric's Hollow almost as frequently as Sirius and Remus had. The werewolf had found that Bella was a good person to talk to: she was quiet and listened intently, and while she wasn't the sort of person to interrupt, she often gave good advice. Like Lily, she was well-read, and the two of them would often meet together to discuss books. Remus and Arabella had had a good friendship, at least while Lily and James were alive. While Harry was around.

But then...after Sirius betrayed them...their friendship came to a sudden halt. In the beginning, Remus felt as though there were no reason to do anything, to go anywhere, to see anyone. It had taken him a long time to sort things out in his head. He was still sorting things out in his head. And while they had initially kept in touch, their letters to each other dwindled until eventually they wrote only once or twice a year. It was hard to start where they had left off; Remus felt that it would be strange to see Bella without Lily or James or Sirius around. Awkward. And at the present moment, he had no idea what to say to her.

Luckily, Bella asked, "What were you thinking about?"

Remus sighed. "Sirius. Why he would do...that." Remus wasn't sure whether he was referring to murdering his best friends or kidnapping their son.

An odd little half-smile slipped over Bella's face, although she didn't look happy. "I could never...I could never figure it out either. Why he would kill Lily and James...they were his best friends...they were my best friends. He had no reason to...he was well-off. He didn't..."

"I know. It must have been in his blood after all." Remus shivered. Sirius had always opposed his family and everything they stood for...only to turn around and...

Another silence.

"Do you remember how, in the beginning...right after the prophecy, right after Harry was born...Dumbledore had proposed that Lily and James isolate themselves from everyone? And they said no, that they trusted us...their friends. That they would isolate themselves, but not from us. And even though I would have respected their decision to go away, to be safe...I was thankful—selfish—in a way, because I didn't want Lily to be gone for who knows how long, because I wanted to see her...and now I wish they would have gone. If they had..."

"I know."

Silence. Bella sighed and looked at him. "How are you, Remus? I mean, really. No 'fine's."

Remus stared at the fire for a moment, thinking. "Tired. I'm tired."

Bella nodded, exhaling slowly. "Me too. I guess everyone is."

"I'm so tired of not knowing...anything. I just wish..." he trailed off.

There was another, longer silence, in which Bella finally became uncomfortable. "Anyway, Remus...I guess I'll go now, I just wanted to see how you were. I'll contact you if anything happens."

"Okay." Remus said faintly. She stepped into the fire, and was gone in a rush of wind and blond hair. The werewolf normally would have been ashamed that he didn't say more, at least a goodbye, but he was caught up in Arabella's words.

Dumbledore had proposed that Lily and James isolate themselves from everyone. That Lily and James isolate themselves from everyone. Isolate themselves...

Didn't James have somewhere...somewhere he could go...

It took a few moments, but when the idea came, it hit him like a bullet: the Safehouse, the Potter Safehouse! James had mentioned it once...it was supposed to be completely safe; it was supposed to be like a castle, with unbreachable wards. James would have gone there, to the safest place he knew about, when they had to "isolate themselves"...hadn't they said they might eventually go there, if things got bad?...and had Sirius been there when James had talked about it?

Remus stood quickly. Yes. He had been there, and later...right after Harry's birth he had gone there with them to check it out and make sure the wards were still intact. Suddenly Remus was sure that was where Sirius had gone, and Harry was with him.

He wasn't sure where the Safehouse was, exactly—only that it was on the outskirts London, hidden to all except for Potters and a person the Potters would trust with their life. As long as a Potter completely trusted a person, that person could come and go as they pleased. At least, that was how James had described it. And Remus was pretty sure that, although Harry didn't know them anymore, the child had once trusted both himself and Sirius. Nothing had happened to make the boy stop trusting them, even if he didn't remember them.

In other words, Remus thought as he drew his wand, there's really no need to tell anyone, as they wouldn't be able to get into the house anyway. He knew that he was acting rashly, but for once in his life he didn't care. Harry's life was on the line. He was almost out of the door when he hesitated, went to the table, and jotted down a note that stated both his theory and where he would be going. "If I'm not back

soon," he told Artemis, his barn owl that was perched on the windowsill, "bring this to Dumbledore." She hooted gravely and flew over to land on his shoulder, nipping his ear once as though to say, "Be careful." He nodded and went out the door.

Remus wasn't even sure that he was making the right decision, but a wave of protectiveness for Harry and one of anger towards Sirius had washed over him, and he didn't even care anymore. All he wanted now was Sirius at wandpoint.

Sirius, Harry, and Devlin trotted down the street, Sirius carrying Harry's backpack in his mouth. Had anyone been looking, they would have been surprised and a little amused to see an enormous black dog hurrying along the purposefully, flanked by two large brown dogs. As it was, there was no one around to look at them. They were on the outskirts of London, heading for the Potter Safehouse, and they had left the busy streets and crowds far behind them.

Sirius found out that Harry had been quite right in saying that the dog's instinct got the best of him every now and then. Harry had stopped once or twice to sniff various things, and had chased a terrified squirrel up a tree. Luckily, all it took to snap the boy out of it was a nudge from Sirius, and the smaller dog would stop in mid-bark or mid-sniff and look at his godfather guiltily. Sirius, of course, found it rather amusing.

Nevertheless, they went on. They had been walking through a forest for some time now: Sirius had explained that the Safehouse had its own small forest and grounds that allowed its owners to walk around in privacy without being seen and that, like Grimmauld Place, the Safehouse didn't really exist except for those who knew where it was and what it was. It wasn't much further now—Sirius could see the top of the house, and the animagus ran on ahead, with Harry and Devlin following happily behind. The latter had grudgingly stopped growling every time Sirius came near Harry, though the animagus wasn't sure whether it was because of his kindness toward the child or because he could turn into a dog.

As they hurried forward, the house came into full view. It was quite a sight. It wasn't overly large nor was it terribly beautiful, but it had an

charming air about it that made it seem to be a perfect place to live. Though nowhere near the size of a castle, it was obviously intended to look like one, with its two towers that looked almost identical, its silver-gray stones, and the Potter crest just above the door.

An odd tingling sensation went through Sirius when he got close enough to the house—the wards had recognized him. He glanced over at Harry to see the dog blink in surprise at the feeling. Sirius gave a doggy grin and approached the rather large front doors, transformed, and pushed them open.

The entrance was rather spacious. A fireplace was directly in front of them, with several red, comfy-looking chairs around it. The walls were a brilliant gold, of course, to complement the sofas for Gryffindor colors.

Harry shifted back to himself, looking as amazed as Sirius felt. “Wow,” he breathed, “I’ve never seen anything this big in my entire life.” Sirius was still staring openmouthed at the room’s splendor, and Harry nudged him gently. “I take it you’ve never been here either?”

“Just once...I’d forgotten how nice it is.” He looked to the right at a staircase that was wide enough for four people to walk upstairs side by side at the same time, and comfortably.

“Shall we?” he asked, smiling. It took a good twenty minutes to completely explore the house. There was enough space inside for eight or so people to have their own bed and bathroom. The rooms were all rather quaint and old-fashioned, with antique beds, arched windows, and narrow and shuddering doors. However, they were also cozy, each with soft carpets and softer beds, and an inviting feeling of warmth and safety. Sirius and Harry couldn’t help but marvel at each new one, running from room to room and calling excitedly to each other from time to time to look at a clock almost as large as Harry, or an odd bookcase that folded into the wall, or interesting little knickknacks that littered a windowsill. They eventually found their way back downstairs, and Sirius flopped backwards onto a couch. Harry sat next to him.

"I can't believe this," Harry said softly as Sirius turned to look at him, "How can this possibly be a Potter house?"

"Your parents weren't poor, Harry. And like I said, this house has been in your family for a while."

Harry scooted over to allow Devlin to stretch out over his lap. "But it seems impossible. I mean, I was living in an old library yesterday, and all of a sudden..."

He trailed off, still looking around. Sirius chuckled and reached out to ruffle the child's hair. Harry winced, and Sirius gently placed the hand on Harry's head.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Nothing. It's just weird." He looked at Sirius apologetically. "Having someone else around, I mean."

Sirius stared at his godson, but the boy had turned toward the fireplace. The animagus wrapped one arm around his godson. "I'm really glad you decided to come with me," Sirius said honestly. Harry looked up at him, green eyes so full of hope that Sirius' heart almost broke. The poor kid hadn't had a single soul to care about him since...for a long time. Sirius would have to make up for all the years when Harry had nobody, but the man found that he didn't mind it in the least. "I love you, kiddo." he said softly. Harry tensed a little and turned to stare at Sirius.

"That's bull," an all-too-familiar voice said from behind them.

Remus had entered the house shortly after Sirius and Harry had gone upstairs to explore. He waited for them to come down, hiding in the doorway. He couldn't believe Sirius had the nerve to not only kidnap Harry, but lie to him and take him to what would have been his parents' house before that traitor sold them out. Remus didn't understand how the man could betray his best friend and trick his son into believing that he was good. How could Sirius sleep at night? More than anything, Harry needed to be told the truth. Before things

went too far and before Harry started to trust the animagus any more than he already did.

The two eventually clambered back down the stairs, and Remus listened to their conversation, fingering his wand all the while. If he was going to do this, now would be the time. He started to screw up his courage, and then—

“I love you, kiddo.”

Remus froze. Now things had gone too far. How dare he? How could he lie to Lily and James’ son like that? If the man had loved Harry at all, he wouldn’t have killed his parents!

“That’s bull,” he said, surprised at how calm he sounded. He pointed his wand at the animagus, watching as Sirius spun around in surprise, and as recognition spread over the man’s face.

“Remus,” he breathed. Harry sat up, clearly wondering what was going on. His green eyes flashed over Remus, looking the man over with more than a hint of fear. Devlin was awake as soon as Harry sat up and tensed, growling at the intruder.

Sirius stood slowly to face the man that had once been his friend. “Remus, you’ve got to listen to me, I never—”

“No,” Remus interrupted coldly. “I think Harry deserves the truth first. Especially since you’ve been lying to him all this time.”

“I never—”

Remus ignored Sirius and turned to face Harry. “Harry,” he said, trying to be gentle although he was inwardly seething. “You’re an orphan, aren’t you? You don’t remember your parents?” It was more of a statement than a question, but Harry nodded slowly anyway, clearly wondering where the stranger was heading and looking uneasily at Remus’s wand, and then at his godfather.

“This man murdered your parents. It’s his fault you never got to meet them.”

Harry's eyes widened, but he shook his head. "No, he didn't," the boy said, "they died in a car crash. It happened when I was only a baby."

Sirius and Remus looked at him in surprise for a moment, and Harry ducked his head and apologized softly. The silence was broken when Remus turned back to Sirius. "Is this the lie you've fed him?" Remus asked angrily.

"No, Moony, listen—"

"Don't call me that." Remus said harshly.

"I didn't tell him that, I swear. The Dursleys must have. But look, you have to hear me out, I never got to tell my side of the story. No one questioned me, everyone just assumed—"

"—there were eyewitnesses, Sirius! Don't try to lie to me as well, I won't fall for it!" He turned to Harry once more. "Harry, your parents didn't die in a car crash. They were a witch and wizard; they hardly even knew how to drive. No, Voldemort killed them. And Sirius here told him where to find them."

Harry's eyes grew wider, if possible. "But he said...he said he didn't kill anyone."

There was a pause, and Remus turned over the words before he spoke them, pondering their weight. "He lied," the man said slowly, softly. "I'm sorry."

"I didn't!" Sirius yelled loudly, stepping closer to Harry. Devlin growled, baring his teeth at both men.

Remus moved his wand to follow his ex-best friend. "Don't take another step, Black. I think you've hurt him enough." It's true, he thought sadly as he looked at the child. Harry looked broken, unbearably hurt, and he was staring at Sirius, and then Remus, and then Sirius again. His eyes were pleading, begging someone to tell him that it was all a joke.

"I thought...but Sirius wouldn't do that...would he?" Harry realized, mentally blaming himself over and over, that he had known Sirius for such a short amount of time, that the man could have easily been toying with him, that Harry had practically accepted him without thinking...

"I didn't! That rat Pettigrew did!" Sirius shouted at Remus. Then, he said softly to his godson, "You have to believe me."

"You killed Pettigrew!" Remus yelled back.

Harry still looked from one man to the other, finally letting his eyes rest on Sirius, looking confused and betrayed. "You lied?" he asked quietly. "You said you didn't kill anyone." Sirius' heart felt as though it had broken for the second time. He didn't think he could handle a third.

"I didn't. I didn't kill anyone," he said, as much to Remus as to Harry. He turned to the werewolf, the man who had been his best friend for years. He looked worn out and tired, but there was anger on his face, and he looked as though he would protect Harry from Sirius at any cost. "We switched Secret Keepers, Remus. I was so, so stupid. I thought...I didn't think anyone would ever suspect Peter. He wasn't smart or good at magic and he didn't have any talents at all, and you were brilliant at magic and you knew so much about it. I thought...but he was the one," he spat, "he led Voldemort right to them. I was supposed to check on him that night, the night that..." he trailed off, watching as emotions flittered across Remus' face. The werewolf opened his mouth to speak, but Sirius quickly cut him off. "But he wasn't there. No one was. The house was empty, and everything felt...wrong. I hopped back on my bike but by the time I got to Godric's Hollow," he swallowed, "there was nothing left of it."

"I wanted to take Harry," he said, glancing at his godson, "but Hagrid showed up. Said Dumbledore was taking him away. I fought for him, but in the end I had to let him go. And I was so mad, I...I just...went after Peter. I wasn't even thinking it would be a trap, I wasn't thinking at all. I was so numb, I just...went. I tracked him down, and there he was, standing in the middle of a street. He shouted about Lily and James, asked how I could do such a thing, and he took out his wand

and blasted the street apart. I watched him turn into a rat after he cut his finger off, and he went down a sewer." He wasn't looking at Remus anymore, but at the fireplace. His voice trembled with anger, but he gritted his teeth and kept going.

"I lost it after that. I kept laughing, because the whole thing was completely insane. I'd been outsmarted by the rat, and I was going to pay for everything he'd done. And the Aurors came, and took a good look at me laughing, and...and they dragged me to Azkaban." As he finished his story, the room was silent. Harry still looked a bit confused, but he let out a breath he hadn't realized he'd been holding and looked at Sirius carefully, as though weighing him. He patted Devlin softly and whispered something, and the dog lay down on the couch once more, watching both men warily.

And Remus was staring past Sirius, and the animagus watched the werewolf's face as all the facts came together. It made sense. Remus had to believe him.

Remus's expression would have been comical in any other situation; he stared at Sirius with wide eyes and an open mouth. A few more moments and Sirius would have thought the werewolf had gone into shock.

Remus finally lowered his wand and stumbled backwards, still staring at Sirius with an odd expression on his face. He collapsed into the nearest chair but didn't take his eyes off of the animagus. Sirius looked at Harry, who was now staring at the werewolf with a mixture of concern and uncertainty.

After a few moments, Remus spoke. "Oh Merlin." he breathed.

Sirius approached him slowly. "I'm so sorry, Remus."

Remus chuckled humorlessly. "For what? You...you haven't done anything," the werewolf swallowed. "You...didn't do anything wrong, but we...Oh Merlin."

"But I am sorry. I'm sorry I doubted you...I shouldn't have, but you're so smart and Peter's so...well, talentless, and I thought...I thought it was you. I was wrong, and...Lily and James paid the price."

Remus looked up with a sad smile on his face. "I'll forgive you if you forgive me."

Sirius echoed the smile. "I already have."

The two friends embraced and held each other tightly for the first time in six years, neither wanting to let the other go. Harry looked on with a slight smile on his face. He watched as Sirius hurriedly wiped something from his eye, and a lone tear streamed down the stranger's—Remus's—face. Maybe in the end, Harry thought to himself as Devlin jumped onto the couch beside him, things won't turn out so bad after all.

A/N: Not sure I liked this chapter; it sounded much better in my head than it does on paper...but at last, things have turned out a little better for everyone, and poor Harry and Sirius can have a bit of a break!

I'm really sorry this chapter's so late, but summer reading is killing me! (of course, if I hadn't decided to wait until there was only two weeks left until school starts, maybe I would be having an easier time with it:P) And my parents have officially dictated "No Harry Potter Until You've Finished Your Summer Reading List" and so I have not, in fact, finished Deathly Hallows yet. They're horrible people, I tell you, horrible. Of course, that doesn't mean I haven't snuck in some of it... ;)

Anyway, a huge thank you to all of my reviewers! I'll try to get the next chapter up pretty soon, so you don't have to wait so long!

moonfyre

Reviews make me happy, and the happier I am the faster I write!

Ten—Of Stories and Blue Skin

(December 5 1987)

"This is absolutely amazing." Remus murmured softly, pulling out of his best friend's embrace. Sirius looked incredibly happy, with a smile gracing his features and a bit of the old sparkle in his blue eyes. He looked, even six years later, much as he had when Remus had last seen him. But the werewolf knew better than that. He could sense a wariness and carefulness about the other man that had never been there before. Sirius looked tired and worn and thin (but he supposed, with a slight twinge of guilt, that Azkaban did that to people).

But Sirius' newfound innocence cast other things into light as well.

Only a few moments before, he had been one of the last Marauders. And the other had been a mass murderer and a traitor. Now he was one of three living Marauders, one of whom was no more a traitor than Dumbledore himself, and the other was even more of a betrayer than Remus thought it possible to be.

It didn't matter. Sirius was innocent. And Harry—he glanced at the last remaining Potter—Harry was safe.

Remus was jarred out of his thoughts when Sirius followed his line of sight. "He's alright, Remus. When I found him, he was all alone—he was alright, of course, eating an ice cream cone, even—and he's been living by himself for a while, I suppose. Well, he had Devlin at any rate."

"Devlin?" Remus inquired. His eyes fell on the brown dog, who was still looking at the intruder watchfully. "Oh."

Harry chose this moment to speak up. "Sorry," he began shyly and rather politely as far as children go, "I don't mean to sound rude, but who are you again?"

Sirius looked surprised, as though he had forgotten that Harry wouldn't remember the werewolf.

"This," he said, putting an arm around Remus' shoulder, "is Remus Lupin. He was a friend of your parents. He's my friend as well."

Harry shook the man's hand. "Remus is a strange name," he commented in a moment of uncharacteristic boldness. He then blinked and grinned shyly. Remus only laughed.

Sirius smiled as well. "I bet you have no idea what's going on, do you?"

Harry awarded Sirius an easy grin. "Not a clue."

Sirius ran one hand through his long, black hair and peered down at his worn, dirty clothing. "I need to get cleaned up first." He glanced at Harry, realizing his godson was in the same predicament: Harry's clothes, though they weren't even close to the state Sirius's were in, had been worn so often that they were quite thin and quite dirty, and there were holes in the knees of his pants. "And so do you."

He reached over to poke his godson's neck, and Harry laughed, pushing Sirius' hands away and pouting. "I don't like getting cleaned up."

"That's obvious." Sirius chuckled. "Anyway, we'll have to fix that, won't we?" Sirius said, putting a hand on Harry's shoulder. "Go on upstairs and take a bath...I guess we'll dig up some clothes for you."

"Kay," Harry murmured. He started up the stairs—with Devlin following close behind him—glancing back at Sirius and then turning away quickly, blushing a little, when he discovered that his godfather was still watching.

"He really trusts you, doesn't he?" Remus asked.

"I think the trust was already there." Sirius said honestly. "All I really had to do was talk with him a bit and he started to relax and joke around with me. I think he just remembers me on some level, that's all."

For a moment, there was silence, but Remus broke it, speaking awkwardly.

“Sirius,” he began softly, “about....about everything, I...I’m so sorry. I didn’t—”

Sirius placed a hand on Remus’s shoulder. “It’s all right, Remus. I guess we’re even anyway: You thought I killed Lily and James and I thought you were the traitor. I’m sorry about that as well,” he faltered, “I should have known it wouldn’t be you. And there’s really no excuse. But now I think...Dumbledore and Fudge themselves could come up to me and tell me you’d murdered everyone in Hogwarts, and I’d have a really hard time believing it. I’d probably tell them to go soak their heads or something, because I know you wouldn’t do that.”

Remus laughed. “That sounds strange, coming from you. So solemn, I mean.” He sobered, “But I feel like that as well.”

“Anyway,” Sirius said, stepping away, “I really do need that shower. Make yourself at home, though. You could explore the house, I suppose—it’s rather large, I had forgotten that it was this big—but don’t go too far, I guess. If Harry doesn’t like baths, he’ll probably be out soon.”

“Sure,” Remus replied as his best friend—his best friend? It felt odd to say that after so long—climb the stairs.

Sirius was right, as luck would have it. Only five or so minutes later, Remus was looking around one of the bedrooms when he heard a soft voice say, “Where is everybody?” He made his way back to the living room at length to find Harry and a dry Devlin standing there.

“Hey, Harry,” he said.

“Hi.” Harry replied shyly.

“It’s nice to finally see you...I’ve been looking all for you all over, you know,” he said lightly, trying to start a conversation.

“Looking for me?” Harry asked curiously.

"Of course. There are a lot of people looking for you, Harry. It was like you'd disappeared off the face of the earth—no one had a clue where you were!"

"Sorry," Harry murmured, deference returning in full. Remus took a moment to look at the child. Harry was extremely small for a seven-year-old. Had Remus not known that Harry was seven beforehand, he would have guessed that the child was five or six. But regardless of the fact that he was so little, he still looked amazingly like his father—coal-black hair that stuck up in the back, glasses. Of course, he was tanner than James, but Remus assumed that Harry was outside quite often. And he had the famous, thin, lightning-bolt shaped scar on his forehead. And he had Lily's startling, piercing emerald eyes, eyes that were looking at the ground. Harry appeared to be casting about for a different subject. "Sirius said you knew my parents?" he asked softly.

"Sure I did. Your father was one of my best friends. He was smart and brave and fun, with a good sense of humor. Just like you." Harry smiled, cocking his head as if to indicate that he wanted to hear more. "Sirius was a good friend as well, along with..." he stopped.

"With who?"

"...with your mother, Lily," Remus finished. "Your parents were top in their year, Head Boy and Head Girl."

"Mum's name was Lily? What was my dad's name?" He looked excited. Almost as though no one had ever told him this much about his parents.

"You don't know your parents' names?" Remus asked incredulously.

Harry looked down at his feet almost immediately. "No, I don't. I'm sorry, sir."

Remus blinked. Sirius had said that the Dursleys had told Harry that his parents had died in a car crash, but he thought they would at least tell him their names. Harry was still staring at the floor.

"There's no need to apologize, Harry." He said gently, sitting on a nearby couch and motioning for Harry to come sit with him. "And don't call me 'sir', it makes me feel old." He grinned. "Call me Remus. Or Moony."

Harry's eyes widened. "Really?"

His expression was so comical that Remus couldn't help but laugh. "Really."

Harry smiled, then his brow furrowed. "Why 'Moony'?"

Remus looked at him, hazel eyes meeting green ones. "That's a story for another time. But back to your earlier question: Your father's name was James."

"James and Lily." Harry said, trying the words out and committing them to memory.

"Right." Remus confirmed. "Now. We have a bit of time before Sirius comes downstairs, and I happen to know a rather good story regarding him and your father. It's rather embarrassing on Sirius' part, of course. Would you like to hear it before he comes back?"

Harry's eyes sparkled, and he nodded slowly; Devlin curled up next to him and placed his head in Harry's lap, looking rather protective at first, but then beginning to wag his tail.

Remus chuckled, and began. "Well then...I suppose the whole thing really started when your father bet Sirius that he couldn't get a girl by the name of Alyssa to kiss him before the week was out. You see, it was well-known that Sirius rather liked Alyssa, who..."

"...and since James had been pretending it was Sirius' fault all along, she turned his hair bubble gum pink and his skin dark blue! It lasted for nearly a week, and on top of that, he could only speak in limericks—that's a funny sort of poem—so, as you can imagine, it was pretty funny when he yelled about it being James' fault. No one could really tell what he was saying; it was like he was speaking

gibberish. Come to think of it, I don't think Alyssa and Celeste ever found out that it wasn't Sirius' fault...Lily had something to do with it, I suppose...anyway, the best part of all was when he was hurrying down the hallway—late for Transfiguration as usual—and he ran into Severus Sn—"

"Moony!" Sirius whined as he came downstairs, still dripping wet.
"You said you'd never tell!"

"I lied," Remus said, smiling.

Sirius couldn't help but grin back. Harry's head was on Remus' chest but he was laughing so hard Sirius thought the child might burst at any moment. Sirius loved that sound with all his heart, though. He somehow got the feeling that Harry hadn't been allowed to laugh much, and he knew he'd have to help make up for the years when Harry had nothing to laugh about.

Harry giggled. "I bet you looked funny when you were blue."

"I did not!" Sirius said, feigning indignance. "I always look very handsome and suave, no matter what color I am."

This, if anything, made Harry laugh even harder. Remus whispered something in Harry's ear (it sounded suspiciously like, "He did too look funny.") that made Harry laugh again.

"Anyway," Sirius said solemnly, hating that he had to stop his godson's laughing, "I think it's time you knew about something, Harry." He sat on a couch opposite Remus and his godson. He and Remus stared at each other awkwardly, each unsure where to start and what to say. Some parts of the story would be harder to tell, and some pieces were difficult to explain. Neither quite knew what to say to begin; they hadn't seen each other in so long that their conversation would not flow with as much ease as it had all those years ago. It was Sirius who finally spoke. "I suppose I'll start. Mind filling in whatever I miss?"

"Sure."

"Once upon a time, a long time ago—well, not so long ago, really, only six years—there lived your parents and you, Harry. Your parents loved you very, very much, but they knew you were in danger because in those times, a Dark wizard named Voldemort was after you."

"Erm, Sirius," Remus interrupted, "does he even know that magic is real yet?"

"Yes, he already knows," Sirius said, "And I've no idea how." His godson shifted nervously in his seat, choosing to look into the fire instead of at Sirius. "...Anyway," Sirius continued, deciding to overlook that fact in face of Harry's obvious reluctance, "because your parents were so scared that you would be hurt, they went into hiding and told only one person where they were. Me." He took a deep breath. "I was their Secret Keeper. But I was your father's best friend, and I thought it would be better if someone else did it." He said, trying to keep the story simple for the seven-year-old's sake.

"Why?" Harry asked.

"Because Voldemort knew how to hurt and kill people. I thought he would know I was the one who was keeping the secret, and that he would know I was the one who was keeping the secret, and that he would get it out of me. So I asked James to switch, and he made someone named Peter Pettigrew the Secret-Keeper. Peter," he said, "was an animagus. Like me. But Peter was a rat." He took another shuddering breath. It was becoming difficult.

"And the rest of the story." Harry breathed. "The rest of the story is what you told Remus before. Peter told. And he lied to everyone. And he made it look like you did it instead of him."

"Yeah," Sirius said gratefully, "You remembered."

Harry nodded. He appeared to be deep in thought. "Can't Remus tell everyone you're innocent? Even if we don't know where Pettigrew is?"

"Maybe." Sirius said doubtfully.

"Probably not. Everyone thinks he's a cold-blooded killer," He said, looking apologetically at Sirius, "They don't know him very well, so they'll think he still is one. It's hard to realize you've been believing the wrong thing for six years," said Remus solemnly, obviously speaking from experience.

They were silent for a few moments, each deep in their own thoughts. Harry drew his knees up to his chest, and rested his head on it, then he broke the silence.

"That's all there is to it, then," he said simply, "We'll just have to find Peter."

A/N: Whew! Finally finished this chapter! I think I'm quite tired of all these conversations, so with any luck I'll make things start picking up again next chapter... In other news, I've finally finished summer reading this morning, so I'm starting Deathly Hallows after I update (yay)!!

Thanks so much to my reviewers, I think I'm officially addicted to reviews now—they make me happy! XD Anyway, school starts tomorrow, people! Why can't my school start next week like everyone else: P Well anyway, luckily I think I'll still be able to update at least once every two weeks from now on, but I'm still aiming for once a week...we'll see how that works out depending on time and reviews lol!

moonfyre

Feed the addiction. Review my story.

Eleven—Revelations

(December 6, 1987)

It was decided by Sirius that Remus should stay at the Safehouse with him and Harry—they had more than enough space with all the rooms there. Remus, of course, had refused countless times (—"I already have a perfectly good house, after all"—) but Sirius insisted; finally, they agreed that Remus would move in without selling Wolfden Cottage. It would have seemed rather suspicious, after all, if Remus had suddenly left his home without appearing to have another. And when the first hues of dawn began to manifest themselves the following morning, Remus awoke in his own room inside the Safehouse.

When his consciousness first began to return to him, he was aware for the first time in a long while that he was comfortable. But it wasn't just comfort—the bed wasn't special, the pillows weren't softer than the ones in his cottage...he was content. He had the strangest feeling that things would be fine now; as stressing and awful as everything had seemed yesterday, things were better. Today everything was different. Today he knew more, felt more than he had yesterday. Today everything was different, stranger, better. He had a reason to live, to laugh. He sat up and leaned out of the bed easily, sliding his feet into his slippers and shuffling out of the room.

No one else was awake. The house relaxed in the quiet; the silence of early morning not yet disrupted by noise. Remus crept downstairs, treading softly to preserve the hush. Yawning and stretching his way into the living room, he jumped in surprise upon seeing the room's occupant.

Harry was sitting on a couch close to the fire, curled up with his legs pressed against his chest. It seemed as though he had been staring at the flames that currently illuminated his face, but upon hearing Remus enter, quiet as the werewolf had been, he turned towards the doorway.

"Morning." Harry said quietly. His arms pulled his legs closer, seeming uncertain.

"Morning." Remus echoed. "You're up early."

"So are you." Harry commented, smiling softly.

That was all. They didn't know what else to say. Harry paused for a moment, then turned back towards the fire. Remus settled down on the couch, leaning his head on the back of the chair. For a few moments, there was no noise but the crackling of the fire and the first tentative birdsong of the morning. Remus opened his mouth to ask a question he'd been meaning to ask, before the silence became awkward and unbreakable.

"Harry?" Remus asked. Harry turned to face the werewolf. "I don't know that I ever got the full story of what happened to you," he said bluntly. He hadn't meant to sound as though he was prying, but he felt it and winced a little.

"I don't know," Harry said shyly. "What do you mean?"

"Since you left the Dursleys, I suppose."

Harry tilted his head, as though he were trying to figure out what motives Remus had for asking. Upon deciding that the werewolf was genuinely interested, he tried to answer. "Um...I don't know. I was just...all over the place. Anywhere I could go, really. I mean, that was before I met Devlin..." Harry sighed. "I don't know where to start, in case you hadn't guessed." The child said with a shy laugh.

"The beginning is usually a good spot." Remus said, smiling. "Where did you go the first day? Or sleep the first night?"

The werewolf watched as Harry's eyes moved to rest on a spot on the ceiling; the child leaned his head back a little as he tried to remember. "I guess...it was in a park." He said slowly. "There were slides and tunnels and a jungle gym. And swings...I crawled up the slide and got in one of the tunnels. I had a blanket, and I just wrapped it around me, and I fell asleep. I was tired...I had run for a long time, to make sure...I felt like someone was going to find me, so I just kept running, and then I just kept walking and then I found the park."

Harry shifted on the couch, sitting Indian-style with his legs crossed over the cushions. “In the morning this kid woke me up. He shook me awake and said I had to move because it was time to play. And I went down the slide and then I just...stepped back and watched the other kids. Only then one of the parents started to look at me funny, because I think she knew I had been sleeping in the tunnel. So I left. But I slept there almost every night for a long while, and I just had to make sure I got up early, before anyone came to the park or anything...” He trailed off, staring at Remus uncertainly once more.

The werewolf pretended not to notice, asking his next question. “When did you meet Devlin?”

Harry had to think about it again. “It was a long time after. I don’t know when...I didn’t keep track of what day it was. But it was a while after I ran away...because after a while I couldn’t get food from anywhere around the playground, so I just...moved, I guess, into the city. I had to sleep in an alleyway for a long time, until I found this old library that no one used anymore, and I just had to get the window open and I usually slept there after that. But...I had a lot more problems in the city than by the playground, because there were gangs and stuff. I was lucky to find Devlin, I think—”

“Wait. Gangs? What do you mean?”

Harry winced a little, looking uneasy. “You know. Just a group of people.”

It became apparent that Harry didn’t want to elaborate further. Remus inwardly deliberated for a moment. He didn’t want to make Harry feel uncomfortable, especially since he didn’t know the child very well yet, but the story needed to be told eventually, and Remus’s curiosity was getting the better of him. He decided to press a little.

“What did they do to you?”

“I don’t know. It wasn’t bad. They just...knocked me around and stuff.”

“And stuff?”

“I was okay.” Harry said uncomfortably. “They just beat me up a little. It was only once.”

Remus stared at the child and slowly put an arm around Harry’s slim shoulders in a silent half-hug. Harry blinked but slowly relaxed at the man’s side. A series of thumps were heard; Sirius was on the way down. A moment later he came through the door with a grin and an ill-concealed yawn.

“Morning.” Sirius said easily. “You two are awake early.”

“So are you.” Harry pointed out, looking relieved.

Sirius grinned again. “Anyways, what’s for breakfast?”

Breakfast was made by Harry, with a little help from Remus. As it turned out, the child was quite good at making omelets. When Sirius asked him how he learned to cook so well, he simply replied, “The Dursleys.” The name was enough to dampen Sirius’s mood; he looked a bit sullen for a few moments before he snapped out of it enough to start a conversation with Remus.

The meal stretched on for a while, until Remus finally admitted that he had to leave.

“What? Where are you going?” Sirius asked. “You know I told you that you could stay as long as you want—”

“I’m not leaving, Sirius. I do know you won’t let me; we argued for a half of an hour yesterday in case you don’t remember. I have to go to...‘work’.”

“Work?”

“Yes,” Remus said amusedly. “I’m supposed to be looking for you, in case you’ve forgotten.”

“Oh,” was all Sirius managed. Then, “Will you—”

"I won't tell anyone, Sirius. I know there's no proof, and I wasn't—"

"I know you won't tell anyone," Sirius smiled. "I was wondering if you'd be back for lunch."

Remus laughed and said goodbye to Harry, who waved shyly back, and to Sirius, who rolled his eyes and told the werewolf to be back soon, dear.

A game of tag began after breakfast. Sirius wasn't exactly sure how it began, only that one minute Harry and Devlin were sitting on the couch in the living room, and the next Harry was bounding about the room, laughing and trying to escape from his dog. The animagus had been sleeping on the couch—he'd woken up far too early in the morning for his taste—until he jerked awake at the sound of Harry's laughter.

He looked around, slightly muddled, until his eyes fell on the dark-haired boy. He smiled once he realized what was going on, and sat up for a better look. Harry jumped off of a chair and hurried up the stairs, grinning back at Devlin who followed him closely.

Sirius lay back down, half-wanting to join in, but he didn't want to make his godson uncomfortable. Regardless, the noise upstairs died down, and Sirius began to doze off again.

He awoke suddenly what felt like a few minutes later, but when he looked at the clock it was half past noon—Remus would be back soon. He wasn't quite sure what had woken him, but his eyes fell once again on the little dark-haired child. Harry was crouching behind the sofa, a smile gracing his features. He peered at Sirius and put a finger to his lips, and Sirius relaxed.

"What—" He stopped when Harry began to shake his head. Following Harry's line of sight, Sirius saw Devlin's paws appear at the top of the stairs. The dog padded softly down the steps, and Harry crouched lower so Devlin wouldn't see him.

Sirius lay back, pretending to be asleep. He saw Harry through slitted eyes, and Devlin out of the corner of his eyes. The dog was sniffing about, trying to find Harry's scent.

Standing quickly, he motioned for Harry to run while Devlin's attention was focused on him. Harry moved, too slowly, too noticeably, and the trick failed. Devlin caught sight of Harry as the child crept toward the stairs.

Harry giggled and raced toward the steps, barely getting there before Devlin was upon him. The pair disappeared upstairs again and Sirius made to lie back down on the couch when he heard a crash, and the shattering of glass.

He jogged upstairs, taking the steps two at a time, to find Harry kneeling, horrified, before a broken lamp that had previously decorated the hallway.

Upon seeing his godfather, Harry winced and crept backwards. "I'm so sorry, I didn't realize it was there! I just turned the corner and—"

"Harry," Sirius interrupted, "Harry, it's fine, we'll just—"

"—I didn't see it! I should have been going slower, but I wasn't thinking—"

"—don't worry about it!"

"—I really am sorry, I didn't—"

"Harry!"

"—please don't—"

"Harry!" Sirius shouted, grabbing his godson by the shoulders. He wasn't expecting Harry to flinch, but the child did. Violently. The animagus let go at once, but Harry backed away, looking frightened and slightly embarrassed. Devlin made a rumbling noise deep in his throat, stepping closer to the boy. Harry touched the dog gently, and Devlin relaxed.

"Sorry," Harry mumbled after a second. "I just..."

"No, I'm sorry. I didn't...what was that?" He asked.

Harry looked uncomfortable. "I don't know. For a second, I just thought you were..." He trailed off, but Sirius guessed.

"You thought I was going to hurt you," he said softly, slowly. "You thought I was someone else."

"N-no." Harry looked up. "No, I didn't. I just...you scared me, is all."

Sirius looked at his godson for a moment; Harry turned away. "I don't think so," Sirius said, leaning forward to put his hand on Harry's shoulder again. The boy backed away quickly. Sirius shook his head. "I don't think so."

Harry looked away. Devlin had stopped growling, but was staring watchfully at both of them. Sirius stepped forward and slowly placed a hand on Harry's shoulder. This time, the child didn't step back, though he did tense slightly.

"I think we'll clean this up later," Sirius said, guiding Harry back downstairs. "For now, you and I need to talk."

He sat on the couch next to Harry, who was fidgeting in his seat. His knees were drawn up to his chest, his arms wrapped around them, and his eyes were everywhere except Sirius. Devlin had opted to sit next to his charge, and he was lying next to Harry and looking directly at the animagus.

"This has something to do with the Dursleys, doesn't it?" Sirius began without preamble. It probably has everything to do with the Dursleys, he thought to himself.

Harry hugged his knees tighter. Devlin whined and Harry gave a tiny sigh and a smaller nod.

Sirius leaned forward slightly and closed his eyes. It was the answer he'd been expecting, but he wished it weren't. He couldn't understand how the Dursleys had done anything to Harry—Sirius barely knew the child, and he already knew he could never intentionally hurt him. Harry, though he didn't know it, had his godfather wrapped around his little finger. He couldn't understand how the Dursleys had done anything to a child at all. To anyone.

"What did they do?" He asked softly. "What did they do to you?"

Harry shifted uneasily in his seat, retreating to rest his back on the support of the sofa. "I don't know...it wasn't that bad."

Sirius gave him a look.

"Um, I mean, it wasn't like they were killing me or anything."

"I'll be the judge of that." He waited expectantly for Harry to continue, and the child sighed once more.

"What do you want to know?"

Sirius hesitated. "I guess just describe what went on every day. Tell me what they did; tell me what a normal day was like there."

Harry looked down at the carpet, away from Sirius. "Well...Aunt Petunia would wake me up every morning by knocking on the door to the cupboard. And I—"

"Wait, wait. The cupboard?"

His godson shrunk a little. "Y-yeah. That's where I slept."

Sirius's voice became dangerously soft. "They made you sleep in a cupboard?"

"W-well, it wasn't a regular cupboard, it was under the stairs and it was big. It wasn't bad; I could fit inside of it—"

"That's no—" Sirius stood up angrily, then thought better of it, glancing back at his godson who had flinched at the animagus' tone. Sirius sat back down and softened his voice. "That's no excuse. That's no way to treat anyone, much less a child." He slowly extended his arm to brush Harry's hair from his face. "You deserve so much better."

Harry looked uncomfortable. Sirius dropped his hand. "Go on."

"Um...then I'd go make breakfast, and serve them. And usually Uncle Vernon would go to work, and Dudley and I would go to school. After that, Aunt Petunia would give me a list of chores I had to do, and it was always very long. Dudley never had anything to do after school, so he'd sit in his room and watch TV...but I always had to hurry up and finish my chores, because Uncle Vernon would come home and watch TV for a long while, but when he was done if I hadn't finished the chores, he'd...get angry with me."

"Angry?"

"Yes." Harry seemed unwilling to volunteer any more information.

"Angry enough to hit you?" Silence. Harry turned away a little, fiddling with the hem of his shirt. Sirius placed his hand on the side of Harry's chin, pulling his godson's head to face him. When he was sure that Harry's green eyes were focused on him, he spoke again. "Angry enough to hit you?"

"Sometimes."

Sirius's heart broke. He wrapped an arm around his godson's shoulders and pulled the child to lean on the animagus' chest. Harry stiffened a little, but Sirius began to stroke Harry's hair gently, and the child relaxed in his arms.

"Do you want to tell me more?" Sirius asked, looking down at Harry's eyes. He saw there an internal battle there; the child tried to decide how much to trust this man, this person he hardly knew.

"No." Harry admitted softly.

Sirius continued to stroke the child's hair, and Harry leaned on him quietly for a moment. Then he said, "I'm sorry."

"Don't be. When you're ready to talk, I'm ready to listen."

And that was how Remus found them, half an hour later. Harry was fast asleep, his head on Sirius's chest, his hair spread out over his godfather's shirt. Devlin had curled up into a ball that Harry's shoeless feet rested upon. Sirius was rubbing the child's back slowly, gazing past Remus, through Remus, as though he couldn't quite focus.

"What?" Remus asked softly, trying to be quiet for Harry's sake.

Sirius didn't answer for quite some time. After a moment, Remus thought perhaps that Harry was only lightly asleep and Sirius didn't want to wake him, but the animagus finally spoke. "The Dursleys were horrible to him, Remus. They beat him."

Remus took a step back. "Beat him?"

"He just told me. He wouldn't say anything except that his—uncle—would beat him if he didn't finish his chores."

The werewolf peered at the child snoring softly in Sirius's lap. "I...I knew he had it bad; Minerva said the Dursleys were a perfectly horrible sort of people. I just...didn't know it was that bad. I didn't think anyone would do that to him. Not Harry." He finished lamely. Sirius, however, knew exactly what the werewolf meant. It felt like nothing could have hurt Harry, nothing would hurt Harry. The child had survived Voldemort; the worst was over. No one would expect this to happen. Not to Harry, not to their Harry.

"He'll be better off with us, Moony." Sirius said, gazing down through Harry's jet black locks to see the small, sleeping face of his godson.

"We'll make sure of it."

A/N: This could possibly be the longest chapter so far; I'm rather proud of myself actually...Anyway, DH was completely phenomenal and I absolutely adored it, especially the ending and the epilogue, but it's weird: I guess I can't believe it's over, really. It's been a brilliant ride, but now I just have to figure out what I'll do with the rest of my life...:)

Anyway...thanks a lot to my reviewers, I thought this chapter would take me forever to write, but when I sat down and saw all your reviews everything just seemed to flow really well. Thanks bunches!

moonfyre

Press the button—you know you want to!

Twelve—The Pranks Begin

(December 13, 1987)

Nearly a week and a half had passed since Remus had found out about Sirius' innocence, and he was surprised to discover just how much could change in such a short amount of time. Harry had changed dramatically over the past week or so. Although he was still shy and polite at times, he had become more open and happier around his godfather and his honorary godfather. He had divulged a few more horror stories about the Dursleys, but since Remus and Sirius had become rather angry after his tales he had obviously thought it wiser to keep a few things to himself.

In an effort to repay Harry for the years spent with his relatives, Sirius had been teaching Harry a few pranks. This included one in which an ingredient slipped into someone's food that would make them burp bubbles uncontrollably for a good hour or so. This particular prank had been much more mischievous than Sirius bargained for, as he found himself burping bubbles instead of Remus, for whom the prank had been originally intended.

Sirius, too, seemed to have changed, though not as obviously Harry had. Remus supposed it had something to do with his being out of Azkaban, but it also probably had something to do with Harry. The little boy had helped Sirius to recover, probably more than the child would ever know. His cheerfulness and innocence and laughter had brought the sparkle back into Sirius' dull blue eyes. The animagus was looking happier by the day, and every time he played with the little raven-haired child, he seemed to perk up a bit. Harry just seemed to be that way around other people: he could cheer Sirius and Remus up just about whenever he wanted to.

Come to think of it, Remus supposed he had changed a bit as well, but since he couldn't see himself from an outsider's point of view, he couldn't be too sure. The werewolf was becoming rather used to life at the Safehouse; he had become aware that he had spent many years without such good company, and felt that he should make up for all of that time now that he had the chance.

But things outside of the Safehouse were different as well: the weather had started to change too. As Christmas approached, it got colder and colder every day. It was on one of these icy winter days, the kind where the clouds were grey and threatening and the air almost tasted of snow, that Sirius, Remus, and Harry first noticed that there was something a bit off in the Safehouse. Sirius had gone upstairs after breakfast in the hopes that a hot shower would help him to warm up. Harry and Remus, on the other hand, were fumbling through the closets, looking for some warmer clothes for Harry: while Sirius could always borrow some of Remus' warmer clothes, Harry's street clothes wouldn't do, and there was no one his age to borrow clothes from. It was while they were searching through a hall closet—it looked to be full of clothes for older people, as most of the closets were—that Sirius' yells and curses were heard from upstairs.

Harry looked at Remus bewilderedly. "I haven't done anything. Did you set up a prank or something?"

Remus shook his head and dropped the black jacket he had been holding, and he and Harry sprinted upstairs towards the shouting, earning an indignant bark for tripping over Devlin who was dozing at the top of the stairs, to find Sirius wrapped in a towel, dripping wet and scowling and shivering.

"The water in the stupid shower just turned freezing all of a sudden!" he exclaimed.

"I didn't do it!" Harry said defensively as Sirius eyed him, the bubble prank obviously coming to mind.

"He was downstairs, Sirius," Remus said. "We were looking for some winter clothes for him. It probably has something to do with the cold weather."

"Sure." Sirius said, looking at them both suspiciously, though his eyes sparkled with laughter.

But the next time something happened, it couldn't have possibly had something to do with the cold weather. Remus went downstairs to make lunch for them—soup, seeing as it was so cold—and all of the

food in the kitchen was gone. He spent a minute or so just looking through the cabinets in disbelief, but the only things he found were two mothballs, a little gray spider, and a stale piece of popcorn. And then, as he peered into the refrigerator—empty as well—the kitchen door slammed shut behind him. Remus spun around in surprise, looking about the room warily. He walked cautiously to the door and opened it. “Sirius?” he called, peering outside. He stepped out. “Harry? Did someone just slam the door?”

Silence.

Then a thud from upstairs, and laughter. Remus smiled. He’d as good as caught them, then. He hurried up the steps.

The laughter was still coming, loudly and continuously, from Harry’s room. Remus threw open the door.

“So—which one of you did it?” he asked, smiling.

Sirius looked up. He’d been tickling Harry up until this moment, and his godson lay on the floor, struggling to regain his breath.

“Did what?”

“Oh come on. I’ll admit you had me for a second. I couldn’t figure out what you’d done with all the food—what have you done with it, anyway? Neither of you have wands, and it would take forever to take all that food out by hand, and then you’d have to disable the Food-replenishing spells on the cabinets—but I know it was one of you.”

By this point, both Sirius and Harry were looking up at Remus bewilderedly. “We’ve been up here for nearly an hour, Moony.” Harry said, blinking. “Sirius has been telling me stories and stuff. We haven’t been downstairs, and we didn’t touch any food.”

“But...” Remus faltered, “but the cabinets are empty, and...and someone slammed the door.”

“No one’s been downstairs, Remus.” Sirius said slowly. “No one but you.”

What followed was a rather long search of the entire house—Remus knew the door hadn't shut of its own accord—and, though the culprit was not found, the food was. It was in a bedroom at the far end of one of the hallways, piled up on the bed. Remus ended up being extremely frustrated. "There must be an explanation for this." He said.

"Well," said Harry, "We'll just have to look into it. But it's no fun solving mysteries on an empty stomach, and I'm starved," he laughed.

A little after lunch had been finished, it began to snow. To Sirius' and Remus' amusement, Harry had become much more spirited after he had seen the white flakes that fell to the ground, bouncing up and down and running from window to window in excitement. Devlin was barking and wagging his tail as well, running around Harry's small body with just as much excitement as his master was. Remus finally found warm clothes that were a bit closer to Harry's size, though the coat fell almost to his knees, and his snow boots were quite roomy, and Sirius borrowed one of Remus' old coats, and they went outside. The wind swirled the downy snowflakes all around them, but the snowfall was light and gentle, and the little crystals fell onto Harry, all over him, paper-whiteness against his ebony hair.

No one remembered who threw the first snowball—it didn't really matter after all, because the only important thing was not to get hit—but soon they were in the middle of a snowball fight, complete with snow forts and giant piles of snowballs. Remus and Harry teamed up to fight Sirius, who had hit both of them one too many times, and Sirius cheated by grabbing Harry by his legs and holding him upside down to shield himself from Remus. Harry squealed as the falling snow got under his coat and he giggled and tried to get away. Sirius was grinning and struggling to hold onto Harry and dodge Remus' snowballs at the same time, when a snowball hit him from behind. The animagus was so surprised that he promptly dropped his godson. Harry fell with a thud and a yelp, but his cry was more out of surprise than anything else, as the soft, fresh snow broke his fall. Sirius jumped up to help him nevertheless, apologizing profusely, and by the time he remembered what had made him drop his godson in the first place, whoever had thrown the snowball was gone, and Remus

had been too preoccupied with making more snowballs to see who had thrown one at Sirius.

By this time, it was blatantly obvious that none of them had been the one to throw the snowball, empty the cabinets, or change the water in the shower. And none of them had any idea who could have done any of those things without being seen.

That night found the three of them sitting by the fire in the living room. Sirius was stretched out over a couch, half-dozing off, lying on his back with his arms behind his head. Remus sat on another couch, hands folded in his lap. He was waiting for Harry to come back from getting a book in one of the rooms upstairs, for, to Remus' immense delight (and Sirius' mock-horror), Harry had turned out to be even more of a bookworm than Lily was, though where Lily liked to read in order to learn something, Harry just liked to read stories. It didn't matter what kind of stories they were—adventure, historical, fiction, fantasy. He liked just about anything. And Remus was more than happy enough to read to him, whether it was from memory, from a book, or making it up on the spot. Harry enjoyed having Remus read him the stories than reading it himself, because, as he put it, "I can only read really slowly and sometimes I have to stop to figure out what long words mean. It's better to have you do it, so I can hear the story faster and you can tell me what everything means." Remus had been extremely surprised that Harry had already read The Lord of the Rings trilogy, and was even more surprised that Harry could understand most of it. It was, in Remus' opinion, a rather complicated book for a seven-year-old to read—but then, Harry wasn't an average seven-year-old.

Soft noises came from upstairs—Harry's socks on the wooden floor—and then Harry came down the stairs and into view. He was smiling slightly, ignoring the hand rails and holding a paperback book. He jumped the last three or so steps and landed on the floor with a thud, as always, walking past Si—

The animagus' hand whipped out and snatched the book out of Harry's small fingers. The man was wide awake now, grinning down at his godson. "Sirius!" Harry whined, though he was smiling good-naturedly. "Give me the book back."

Sirius, of course, laughed and held the book high above his and Harry's head. This had become something of a nightly ritual, as it burned a bit of their energy, making them both tired enough to settle down. Remus only smiled. It seemed as though there were two children in the house, as neither Harry nor Sirius would be able to sleep if they didn't run around a bit.

Presently, Harry was trying to climb up Sirius' waist to get to the book, and Sirius fell over and scrambled away, running around the room.

"Come on, Sirius!" Harry yelled through his laughter.

"Catch me if you can!"

Harry just laughed some more.

After five minutes or so of this behavior (in which Harry was more often than not jumping to try and reach for the book, though he didn't come close to getting that high, of course) Remus saw Harry stop in his tracks, a strange expression on his face. His eyebrows furrowed and his mouth twisted upwards, and suddenly—Remus didn't even know how to describe it—Harry wasn't Harry anymore. It was a sudden change, though it wasn't the sudden 'pop' of an animagus transformation. Harry visibly became smaller, his skin turning black and growing feathers, and in a matter of three seconds a raven was standing in the space that Harry used to be in. The bird—Harry—opened its wings and cautiously beat them a few times, gaining confidence as it—he—rose off the floor. He flew over to Sirius, snatching the book out of his hands, though the animagus was too startled to do anything but stand there.

Harry flew back over towards Remus, landing in his lap and shifting back to himself. He grinned and poked his tongue out at Sirius, who had come out of his shock and just smiled and winked—something Harry understood to mean "You've won until tomorrow night." He handed the book to Remus, who was still staring at him with an odd sort of smile on his face.

The significance of Harry's actions was not lost on the werewolf. He understood that Harry did not trust just anyone with his secret, and even more than that he understood that Harry's shifting in front of them meant that, on a certain level, he trusted Sirius and Remus. Probably a lot. The child didn't go all around showing off the fact that he could change into animals at will, and it instilled an odd sort of pride in Remus that the child would choose to show him his magic.

Remus noticed that Harry was looking at his knees with an unreadable expression on his face, and that Sirius was looking into the fire with a strange smile. He took this to mean that both of them understood the implications of Harry's action as well. He pulled his honorary godson into a quick hug, pretending not to notice the happy look that suddenly started to dance across Harry's features, and opened the book. He felt Harry snuggle into the couch next to him and rest his head on Remus' chest, and the werewolf began to read where they had left off in their book, the odd smile still lingering on his face.

Harry sat up in bed, giving a little sigh and resting his head in his hands. After tossing and turning for nearly two hours, he had finally found it impossible to fall asleep. He listened with a degree of jealousy at Devlin's peaceful snores, wishing that he were off in dreamland with his friend. Turning to dangle his feet off the side of his bed, he slowly slid himself off of the sheets and onto the cold floor. Although he originally had the idea of going to the kitchen for a drink of water, he decided as he left the room that sitting next to a warm fire sounded much more appealing.

As he crept downstairs, he realized that the fire was already crackling with life—someone was in the den. He peered cautiously around the corner, only to see Remus staring carefully back at him from one of the sofas. The man smiled.

"You're up late, Harry."

Harry stepped over to the sofa and slid onto the cushion next to Remus. "So are you."

"I'm allowed to stay up as late as I like. You, however, are supposed to be sleeping."

Harry grinned up at the man. "But then you wouldn't be able to spend time with me."

Remus rolled his eyes, and then became serious. "Why are you awake so late, anyway?"

The child shrugged. "Couldn't. My brain kept talking to me, and it wouldn't let me sleep." The man chuckled, throwing an arm around Harry's shoulders, and was slightly surprised when, after a short pause, Harry veered off the subject. "Remus...do you think I'm...strange?"

The werewolf blinked. "Of course not, Harry. Why would you ask that?"

Harry sighed. "I don't know...I mean, first I found out I'm a wizard, which was different, and then I'm also a shapeshifter, which is weird even for wizards. I just don't...I mean, why do you guys even..." he trailed off uncertainly, looking at Remus as if he was unsure how much he should say.

Remus felt that he was pretty sure he knew what Harry was about to say. "We still love you because...well, we're a family now. I mean, we aren't related by blood, but we're a real family just the same. And when you're in a family you have unconditional love."

"Unconditional?" Harry asked, the word sounding foreign to his ears.

"Unconditional means always, forever. It means you stay together, no matter what happens."

Harry seemed to be thinking about Remus's words. "Unconditional. I like the sound of that."

Remus grinned and ruffled Harry's hair. "Was that why you couldn't sleep, then?" he asked. The child smiled shyly back at him. "I'll take that as a yes, then."

Harry curled up, resting his head in Remus's lap as the man gently stroked his hair. He listened to the fire crackle for a few moments, and then murmured, "Thank you, Remus." The only indication that Remus heard him was a slight pause in the man's ruffling his hair, and after a few moments Harry finally succumbed to sleep in Remus's arms.

Disclaimer: I already said I don't own Harry Potter, but I also don't own The Lord of the Rings. Obviously.

A/N: Wow, that's almost more sappy fluff than even I can handle! ;P Anyway, sorry this chapter's later than I would have liked—my teachers obviously don't understand the tradition of light homework to start off the school year.

Thanks to everyone who reviewed—you're awesome! And, I hope to have the next chapter out in the next week/week and a half, so look out!

moonfyre

Reviews make me happy, and a happy writer means faster chapters!

Thirteen—A Risk Involved

(December 15, 1985, early morning)

It had been a couple of days since Harry had shown them his shapeshifting, and since then he had transformed into the little black fox that Sirius had seen, and a sparrow, explaining that he tried not to do too many animals in too little time, as it usually ended up confusing him. Besides that, nothing of much importance had happened. Sirius had nearly burned the kitchen down trying to make eggs one morning, but as that happened once every couple of days or so, it didn't really count.

Remus had decided to go to Dumbledore to “help” with the search that morning, and he and Harry were in the kitchen. Harry was making him an omelet (they were quite good, and despite the fact that he had learned it during his time with the Dursleys, Harry seemed to love cooking. Though Remus had been wary of letting Harry too close to the hot oven or stove at first, the little child had proved himself to be quite adept. He was an excellent cook, and it was a lucky thing considering that Sirius was no longer allowed near the oven or stove). Sirius was stretched out in the den, having awoken a few moments ago, come downstairs, and fallen back asleep on the sofa. He did so every morning, and was oblivious to the fact that Remus and Harry found it very amusing.

They had decided that Remus would go to work as usual, as it would raise questions if he suddenly pulled out of the searching—he had always been very angry with Sirius, after all. As an added bonus, if the search parties and Aurors got too close to finding out where Sirius and Harry were, Remus could try to draw them away. Of course, Remus thought, if Dumbledore figures it out, I won’t even have a chance to draw them away...

He was pulled out of his thoughts when Harry put a plate down in front of him, the ham and cheese omelet still steaming slightly. “There you are,” the little boy said, pushing a fork towards Remus.

“Thanks, Harry. You do make good omelets.”

"The best." Harry grinned as the kitchen door opened to reveal a yawning Sirius.

"Mmmm." Sirius said, his sharp nose working overtime. "Something smells good."

"I made Moony an omelet. Do you want one?"

"Sure," Sirius said, looking enviously at Devlin who was still snoring softly on the floor. The dog didn't seem to like the cold weather, and right now it seemed to enjoy sleeping more than anything else. "Something that smells that good has to taste good as well, right?"

Harry just laughed and started cooking again.

"Off to work again, Moony?"

"Unfortunately, Padfoot, yes, I'm off to pretend to look for you again."

Sirius grinned cheekily as Remus picked up some papers from the tabletop. "Well, have fun!"

Remus mock-glared at Sirius as he walked towards the fireplace. "Goodbye, Harry. Sirius."

"See you, Moony!" Harry called out with a smile as Remus disappeared into the emerald flames. He added some cheese to the omelet (Sirius seemed to be addicted to the stuff), and said "Sirius? Just how much cheese do you want on this thing anyway?" Harry turned around. "Sirius?"

"You know, we really have to figure out what's going on."

Harry looked up in surprise and laughed. Sirius was pressed up against the ceiling, his back flat against it and his arms and legs spread-eagled, as though he were metal and a magnet was pulling him upwards.

Harry giggled. "Whatever's doing this, it's got a lot of good ideas."

Sirius mock-glared at Harry. "Personally, I can't say that I think this is a good idea. I'm not the type to like being glued to a ceiling."

Harry smiled, clearly amused. "I would think not. Any idea how to get down?"

"Not really. Without Moony here to look for countercharms...hey, couldn't you transform and help?"

Harry grinned. "Maybe...and maybe not. Maybe it's more fun to see you attached to the ceiling."

"Harry!" Sirius whined. "I don't want to wait here until I—"

Whatever force that was gripping Sirius suddenly released him; he plummeted to the ground with a thud and landed in an unsightly heap.

“—fall.”

Harry tried, but could not smother his giggles. In the past few days, the inhabitants of the Safehouse had grown more and more accustomed to the pranks. Although they had been frightening and nerve-wracking at first, all three of them had become pretty used to it. Sirius and Remus had theorized about many things (Sirius was positive that it was a chameleon ghoul), but in the end it had been Harry who had seemed to hit upon the best theory, and it had made both of his guardians want to slap themselves for not realizing it earlier—it was probably a poltergeist. The ghosts were much more likely to live in an old wizarding house than a new one, so it made much more sense than any other theory. The three of them had spent a long day of flipping through many of the books in the small library upstairs, and as soon as Harry had said told them about his guess, both of his guardians did, in fact, slap their hands to their mouths and roll their eyes at their stupidity: seven years with Peeves' pranks and Harry had figured it out first.

"Stupid, cowardly poltergeist." Sirius muttered as he stood. "Too bloody afraid to show itself. I can't wait to lay my hands on that thing."

Harry laughed.

Remus sipped a cup of coffee, trying to block out the steady chatter of people in the next room. He was sitting in someone's waiting room in the Ministry—frankly, he was too exhausted to care whose—savoring a few minutes of relative peace.

It had been a long day, mostly because Sirius had been falsely sighted near a store in Italy. Aurors had been there within minutes, only to find (and nearly arrest) a gentleman reading the paper who looked vaguely like Sirius. He wasn't the convict, obviously, and after he had been released by the Ministry Obliviators, the Aurors had returned to the Ministry with sullen and depressed expressions on their faces. After that, Remus had headed towards the first secluded area he could find for a bit of a break; everything was always rather hectic here. People were hurrying all around, moving paperwork, bouncing theories off of one another and hoping for a new lead on Sirius' whereabouts. Remus had gotten a headache almost right away—the full moon was tonight, after all, and he certainly didn't need this kind of excitement.

The headache was only partially from the chaos of the Ministry, however: he and Sirius were still debating over what to do with Harry tonight. They knew that Remus would be alright in the basement—it could be padlocked, and Snape was supplying Remus with the newly-discovered Wolfsbane potion—but they still hadn't told Harry anything yet. Not saying anything at all was completely out of the question, of course. Harry was too curious for them to make up an excuse as to why they were both staying in the basement overnight, and even if he wasn't curious Remus' howls would definitely let him know what was going on.

Remus knew that he would have to tell the shapeshifter about it this afternoon, and despite Sirius' reassurance that Harry wouldn't care whether Remus was a werewolf or not, Remus couldn't help but worry. Sirius and James and Peter had accepted Remus for who he was, but that was different—Harry was so much younger than the three of them had been and would probably be frightened.

Over the past few days, he and Harry had grown closer and closer, and Remus now considered the raven-haired child to be a part of his

pack. He didn't want to lose Harry, nor did he want the child to be afraid of him.

But he would have to tell. That was just the way of things.

He sighed moodily, shaking his head to rid himself of these despairing thoughts. Picking up his cup of coffee, he stood and headed towards the doorway. People would be looking for him soon.

The object of Remus' thoughts was jumping back and forth on the scarlet couches of the Safehouse at that very moment, his jet-black hair rising and falling with each bound. He twisted and turned happily in the air, laughing as Sirius walked into the room and grinned at him. What followed was one of their many "tickle fights" as Remus liked to call them, that included Sirius tickling Harry mercilessly and Harry trying to tickle Sirius back – which never really worked – and Harry laughing until his sides hurt. These fights were random, seeming to happen for no reason at all other than Sirius' seeing Harry, and they probably took place as a way for each of them to show that they enjoyed being in the other's company.

"So what are we going to do today, Sirius?" Harry panted after Sirius had finally finished tickling him.

Sirius shrugged. "I thought we could—"

He was interrupted by a thump on the door. Both of them froze, eyes meeting in silence. "That's not Remus," Harry whispered. "He isn't due back for—". Sirius put a finger to his lips to quiet his godson. He stood, listening to the silence for a moment...

Skitter skitter skitter.

A scratching noise came from the door. Sirius hesitated, staring in disbelief, and then walked towards it slowly, wishing that he and Remus had figured out some way to get him a wand. He turned the knob and opened the door a crack, peeking to see who it was.

Sirius said a word that Harry figured he wasn't supposed to hear. "Who is it?" he asked softly.

His godfather glared at the door and opened it wide for Harry to see, and the shapeshifter couldn't help but laugh out loud as a familiar dog trotted inside, shook himself to get the snow out of his fur, and nonchalantly went to curl up by the fire to get warmer. The look on Sirius' face was priceless, though Harry couldn't say it aloud.

"Who let him outside, anyway?" Sirius asked grumpily as Devlin snuggled a little closer towards the fire.

"He probably went out when Remus did." Harry said, stifling a giggle, "He always used to let himself out and just disappear for a week or so...he's a street dog, so he does whatever he likes to, mostly...and besides, I bet he just had to go or something."

"Well...he could have had the decency to bark or something so we would have known he wasn't an Auror or something."

"He's just a dog, Sirius," Harry laughed, "He likes to go outside sometimes. He doesn't like to be cooped up in here every day."

"Yeah, well, neither do I," Sirius said tiredly, pushing a hand through his black hair. "I wish we could..." he stopped, and looked at Harry calculatingly. "Let's go out," he declared suddenly.

Harry looked at him curiously. "You mean, to play...?"

"No," Sirius shook his head. "I mean...well, there are some shops close by...just for a while."

Harry blinked. Leaving the Safehouse completely? Hadn't Remus said something about not leaving? "I don't know, Sirius," he said, thinking. "I'm not sure that's a good idea."

"Come on, Harry," Sirius coaxed. Having had enough time to decide that his plan was a good one, he was already walking towards the door to reach for his jacket. "No one will even notice us. It's nearly Thanksgiving, and no one pays attention to other people near holidays. They're always too busy buying food and that sort of thing."

Harry's brow was still slightly furrowed, but he'd had enough of being inside all of the time as well—and besides, Sirius was grown-up enough to know what they could and couldn't do, right? Harry could trust him.

"Come on, I know you want to go. I've seen you looking out the window all the time! Besides, you'll be perfectly safe as long as I'm around. We'll grab some candy or something."

Whether it was the promise that he would be safe or the promise of candy, Harry gave a little sigh, and relaxed. "Okay. But we have to be really, really, really careful."

Sirius grinned. "I promise. Careful is my middle name."

The marketplace turned out to be less than two miles away. Under any other circumstances, one or even both of them would have been complaining about the long walk, but as it was they were grateful for the chance to stretch their legs.

It was a crisp but chilly winter day. The sun was shining through the clouds and the air was dry and cold almost to the point that it hurt Harry to breathe in. He ignored it, running through the soft, untouched snow that came up to his knees. Devlin seemed to enjoy the newer snow as well, because he was barking and running in circles around his master. Sirius joined in a little, playing with Harry on the way, but for the most part he just walked along quietly with a contented sort of smile on his face.

They arrived in about forty-five minutes, thanks to Harry and Devlin's dilly-dallying at various places, only to find that the market wasn't much like the first one they'd been at. This one consisted of different little shops on either side of the narrow street. Much to Sirius' relief, it was quite crowded, presumably because it was a weekend. The shops were old-fashioned, very small, and packed tightly, so (at least in Sirius' opinion) there was little chance that anyone would give them so much as a second glance with so many people trying to push their way around each one.

"Come on, Sirius, this way!" Harry shouted over the chatter of people, "I think I see a candy shop!"

They crossed the street in the direction of the shop, Harry holding on tightly to Devlin's leash in one hand and Sirius' hand in the other. They had to sidestep and avoid a car and a few large groups of people, but Harry finally let go of his godfather's hand and ran forward into the store. "Come on, Sirius, hurry!" He yelled happily. Sirius obeyed, stepping into the shop and feeling slightly relieved that he could get away from the cold outside.

The shop was bright and sunny, with golden-yellow walls and tan carpeting. It was filled mostly with children—there were kids all over, running around, begging their parents for candy and showing treats to their friends. There were buckets and trays of candy all over the store, candy lining the walls, on tables, and on shelves.

It may not have been quite as good as Honeydukes, but Sirius had definitely lost Harry to the lure of sweets—and, as he realized a moment later, he had also physically lost his godson. He blinked and looked around the room, searching for the boy. Great! He thought, I've lost Harry and we haven't even been here for ten minutes. He called out Harry's name a few times, but the shop was so noisy he doubted Harry could hear him. Just when he was beginning to get seriously worried, he spotted a little tuft of jet-black hair behind one of the tables. He started off in that direction and finally found Harry and Devlin hungrily eyeing some chocolate balls.

Sirius chuckled softly at the awestruck expression on Harry's face.

"Look, Sirius!" Harry said, green eyes wide with excitement. "I've never seen candy this big in my life!"

"You'll see bigger someday. In Honeydukes—in Hogsmeade, remember?—there are some that are much bigger."

Harry's eyes, if possible, got even wider. "Really?" He asked, suddenly looking at Sirius skeptically.

"Of course there are!" Sirius exclaimed, feigning indignance. "Would I ever lie to you?"

"Yes," Harry grinned.

"That's besides the point." Sirius said. "I am telling the truth, and I wish I could show you..." he trailed off; he and Harry knew perfectly well the consequences of being caught in Hogsmeade. "...well, I guess these will have to do." He finished, smiling at Harry. "James and Remus and I used to go to Hogsmeade all the time. Well, it was mostly James and I—Remus had too much of a conscience to do it," he said grabbing a bag. "and after he was made a prefect he was even worse—here, hold this and I'll put some in."

"I thought you could only go to Hogsmeade at certain times," Harry said, brow furrowed.

"True. You're only allowed to go to Hogsmeade on certain weekends—hold it open wider, Harry—but in our fourth year, we found a secret passageway that leads you right into Honeydukes' cellar, so we could go anytime we wanted.

"Wicked," Harry said softly, and Sirius could practically see him storing that information for use when he was at school. They got up to the counter and Sirius paid for the candy, slightly disconcerted at the fact that the shopkeeper kept staring at him and Harry curiously. They couldn't get out of the store quite soon enough for him, and as soon as the man handed him the bag of sweets he muttered a "thanks", grabbed Harry's hand, and dragged him out of the store.

As they left, the animagus couldn't help but glance over his shoulder once more. He shook it off a moment later and gave the bag of candy to Harry, who grinned and popped one into his mouth. They had just started walking down the street on the lookout for any interesting stores when Sirius caught Harry giving Devlin a chocolate ball.

"Don't give him that, he'll be sick!" Sirius exclaimed, but the dog was already munching on the sweet.

"Don't worry, Sirius! He eats chocolate all the time! He's gotten rather used to it."

Sirius eyed the dog doubtfully, but looked at his godson a moment later when the child laughed, "Besides, if dogs can't eat chocolate, neither can you!" Sirius rolled his eyes and grinned, chasing Harry down the street.

There's something off about them, the shopkeeper thought to himself as he put the money in the cash register. Can't quite put my finger on it...

He watched their retreating backs out the window, until they disappeared into the crowd. They were polite enough, especially the kid...although the dog was pretty strange. He felt as though he knew them from somewhere, or was supposed to know them...but he couldn't remember...

Even after he finished work a few hours later and closed up shop, he still couldn't remember. It kept pushing all other thoughts out of his head: who were they and why were they important?

It eluded him even as he pulled the blankets up to his chest and settled into his bed that night. Oh well, he thought. I'm sure it will come to me...

A/N: Please don't kill me:ducks various objects flying her way: I'm really, really sorry! Three weeks is much longer than I expected to have you wait for a chapter. But honestly, it isn't my fault—my English teacher assigned us a monster term paper, and it's taken me forever just to do the research! I can't say this chapter turned out how I would have liked, but I hated not being able to update for such a long time...anyway, on the plus side I've written about three-quarters of the next chapter, so hopefully I'll get that out a lot sooner.

Anyway, the answers to a few questions that have popped up in reviews:

Who/what is causing the pranks in the Safehouse?

Obviously, I can't tell you—or else I'd ruin it! Some of the guesses are pretty far off, but I think quite a few people have guessed correctly...

Will Arabella be back soon?

Not for a few more chapters. She's only a minor character for now, but later on...who knows?

Is there something special about Devlin?

Yes. And I love knowing who he is while you guess—and so far, no one has gotten it right! (But feel free to keep guessing anyway:P)

Will you put in a scene with the Dursleys?

Still unsure about that—the plot I came up with comes first, but if I can fit it in and I have time to write it, I might put it in somewhere...

Thanks, as always, to my reviewers—if it weren't for you all, I probably wouldn't have gotten this chapter out until another few weeks!

Moonfyre

Fourteen—The Full Moon

(December 15, late evening)

By the time they had finished up in the marketplace, it was nearing five o' clock, and Remus would be due back soon. The walk back to the Safehouse seemed longer and harder than the walk to the marketplace, mostly because they were carrying bags and because the excitement had worn off. Needless to say, they were tired and out of breath when they finally reached their destination, and barely had the energy to take their wet clothes off and dry them so Remus wouldn't get angry with them. The fire turned an emerald green just as they finally sat down on one of the scarlet couches.

"Hello, you two." Remus said as he stepped out of the fireplace. He smiled faintly and brushed the soot off of his robes, then regarded them, making them uncomfortably aware of what they had done that day, as if Remus had a built in guilt detector.

"You both look tired," Remus commented. "What have you been up to?"

"Just a snowball fight. And tag." Sirius said.

"Yeah, and jumping on the beds."

Remus eyed them oddly, but they apparently passed the test. "As long as you weren't jumping on my bed."

"Course not," Harry said mischeviously.

Dinner that night was a quiet affair on Remus' part—at least in Harry's opinion. The sandy-haired man rarely spoke, even when Sirius and Harry tried to engage him in conversation. Halfway through the meal, Sirius looked at Remus suddenly and then glanced at Harry and stopped talking as much. Eventually, all noise was reduced to the quiet clinking of forks and Devlin's noisy munching whenever Harry snuck him a bit of food. The second hand on one of the clocks was audible, and it seemed to Harry that this uncomfortable silence would stretch on forever. He fidgeted a little, wondering what was going on,

completely oblivious to the fact that Remus and Sirius were exchanging significant glances.

Remus finally put his spoon and fork down and sighed, looking at Harry with a sad sort of expression on his face. "Harry," he said quietly, "I have something to tell you, something I probably should have told you earlier."

Harry shifted uneasily in his seat, wondering what was making his unofficial guardian act so strangely. "Okay."

"Should I leave, Rem?" Sirius asked, standing and looking back and forth between Harry and Remus.

"No." Remus said, shooting his friend a grateful look as Sirius sat back down obediently. "Harry," Remus began, "Remember all those stories I've been telling you? About your father and Sirius and I?"

"Of course," said Harry, looking at Remus in confusion. "Why?"

"Do you remember how I told you about James and Sirius becoming animagi?" Remus asked, ignoring Harry's question.

"Yes," Harry answered slowly. "And how you weren't one."

"Right," said Remus with a deep breath. "Harry, I—...there's a reason why I didn't become an animagus. The reason James and Sirius made the potion and became animagi was for me."

Harry tilted his head curiously. "Why?"

Sirius rolled his eyes at Remus and whispered, "Get to the point."

Remus sighed again, "It was so they could accompany me on full moons, Harry."

His sentence seemed to hang in the air for a long time before Harry could wrap his head around it. Then, all at once, he understood. "You're a werewolf." He said suddenly.

Remus nodded, looking at Harry with a tinge of worry.

Harry stared into space for a moment, a faint smile appearing on his face. “So that’s how you can always tell when Sirius is starting to burn something, or when we’re about to pull a prank. You’ve got great smelling and hearing,” he looked back at Remus. “I don’t know Moon—” He smiled. “—Moony, but it doesn’t seem like you’re the type to be a werewolf. I mean, you’re nice and smart and gentle and you almost never get angry. Are you sure you are one? A werewolf, I mean.” He asked, noticing the grin beginning to form on Sirius’ face.

“Positive,” Remus said uncertainly.

“Oh. Alright then. Is that all, because you’re supposed to read me the rest of Treasure Island tonight.

Sirius grinned as Remus spluttered a little. “Wait,” he said, “you aren’t mad? Or afraid?”

“Course not, Moony.” Harry said. “A wise person once told me that real families have unconditional love, which means you always stick together, no matter what.”

Remus smiled at Harry with a soft look in his eyes before embracing the child. “You’re the best, Harry,” he said, ruffling the shapeshifter’s hair. His expression faltered. “But...Harry, the full moon...it’s tonight.”

Harry stared. “So?”

“Well, I’m going to be down in the basement—”

“—with me as Padfoot,” Sirius interrupted.

“And me.” Harry answered promptly.

“No, Harry,” said Remus sadly, “that’s the other thing I wanted to talk to you about.”

“What? But why can’t I—?”

"Harry, as a werewolf, I'm ten times stronger than any other animal. Sometimes I...sometimes I hurt Sirius, and sometimes it's a lot. Even if I'm only playing. I won't let you get hurt."

"But maybe I could try being a wolf!" Harry protested. "I'd be strong, and you wouldn't—"

"No, Harry," said Remus.

"But I—"

"No. And that's final," Remus added when he saw the boy's mouth about to open again. Harry looked away with a somewhat hurt expression on his face. Remus put a finger under Harry's chin and forced the child to look at him. "I'm doing this because I don't want you to get hurt."

"I know," said Harry, his green eyes meeting Remus' sadly.

"Anyway, come on. I'll read some more of Treasure Island to you before I have to go."

A little over an hour later, Harry watched Remus and Sirius disappear into the basement and close the door behind them. He heard the silver locks click on the other side of the door, footsteps descending the stairs, and then there was nothing. The child stood and stared at the door for one more second before running into the den. "Devlin," he called, grabbing a throw pillow and a blanket off of one of the sofas. "Devlin, where are you?"

Harry heard a bark from upstairs, and then the clicks of Devlin's claws on the stairs. The child walked back towards the basement door and sat down, leaning against the wall. "Hey, Dev," he said as the dog came into view. "Sorry, but would you mind keeping me company for a bit?" Devlin butted his head against Harry's shoulder and turned himself in a circle to curl up next to the child. "Thanks," said Harry, scratching behind Devlin's ears in gratitude.

They stayed like that for a few moments that seemed like an eternity to Harry, who began to stroke Devlin's fur almost absent-mindedly.

The only sounds were the steady ticking of the clock, and Remus and Sirius' voices that drifted up the stairs every so often. Devlin whined and nudged Harry every so often to make sure that his charge was okay, but Harry barely even noticed. He was waiting for the howls he knew would come once Remus began to transform.

A few moments later, he heard them.

Low howls came from the basement, along with whimpers and whines of pain. For what seemed like the longest time, the entire house seemed to shudder with the wolf's guttural noises.

The hair on Devlin's back stood on end, and the dog was sitting with his ears perked up and his teeth bared a little. He began to growl, placing himself between Harry and the door. Harry, in turn, shivered under his blanket and it wasn't because of the cold. For the first time that night, he couldn't help but feel glad that Remus had forced him to stay out of the basement. Now that the werewolf had finally finished transforming, Harry could hear his growls, and the barks and yips that Sirius made, whether out of playfulness or pain.

He scooted a little closer to stroke the brown dog, whose growls had now become a steady rumble. Devlin quieted a little, but did not stop staring at the door. Hugging his knees close to him with one arm, Harry continued to pet Devlin with the other, thinking. He was afraid of the wolf downstairs, he knew...but not Remus. The wolf part of Remus was out of his control, just as Harry couldn't help being a shapeshifter. It was a part of him, something that wouldn't go away. A big, furry, scary part of him. Harry shivered again, edging away from the door a little.

He listened for a few minutes as the growls turned into playful snarls and howls and Sirius' painful noises became funny yips and snorts. It's okay. It's okay. It's just Remus. Even if he is a little scarier than usual...he won't hurt me. Harry rested his head on Devlin, who had calmed down slightly and was now curled up on the floor watching the door. I'm okay...

(December 15, early morning)

Someone was shaking him awake. "Sirius. Sirius, wake up."

He groaned, but it came out like a growl. He shot up, remembering last night. Remus sat on the basement floor in front of him, looking weary and a little bit ill. "You alright?" He asked softly.

"Fine." Remus murmured, rubbing his side. He was sporting a few more scars, some on his arm, some on his shoulder—his shirt was ripped to reveal a thin red line—and a few more bruises than he had the night before. He was also holding himself in a slightly different way, as though he was half torn between sagging to the ground and holding himself up to show that he was alright. Sirius vaguely remembered that Remus used to do that back at Hogwarts as well, and he must have been looking at the werewolf doubtfully because Remus smiled weakly and said, "Really, Sirius, I'm alright. Better than usual, at least."

Sirius shook his head and stood up, offering a hand to Remus to help pull him up. "Come on, let's get you upstairs and have a look at you," he said as he slung an arm around Remus's shoulder to help him up the stairs. You look terrible."

Remus smiled wryly. "Thanks."

Getting up the stairs took a few extra moments—Remus's leg was bruised and it hurt a bit to put his weight on it—but they managed. Sirius turned the knob and pushed the door open, but it hit something solid. His brow furrowed; he managed to poke his head through the door and saw what it was at once: Harry had fallen asleep right outside of the door. The little shapeshifter's head was resting on a lightly snoring Devlin; one arms was wrapped around his friend and he was curled up into a tight ball under a blanket. Sirius chuckled and pulled back to answer Remus' questioning glance.

"It's Harry. He must have fallen asleep waiting for us." Remus grinned tiredly, and Sirius got to work nudging the door open slowly so he wouldn't hurt or wake Harry. Finally, Sirius was able to squeeze through the door, and he led Remus to a sofa in the den.

"There. You're alright," Sirius said, grabbing a blanket. "You just need some rest." He spread the blanket over the werewolf, who smiled sleepily at his friend.

"Thanks," Remus said softly, closing his eyes. Sirius walked out, shutting the door softly behind him.

"Wake up, Harry." A voice invaded his dreams, a hand was on his shoulder. Harry stirred, pushing the hand away. The voice chuckled somewhere above him. "Come on, Harry, you can't sleep on the floor all day." It said.

On the floor? He wasn't on the floor. He opened his eyes blearily and blinked a few times. Sirius came into focus, a grin stretched across his face. Oh yeah. He was on the floor. And his pillow was snoring. Sirius grabbed Harry's hands and pulled him to his feet. Devlin huffed grumpily, curled up more tightly, and went back to sleep.

Harry yawned and looked at Sirius sleepily before everything came back to him. "Where's Moony," he asked, suddenly wide awake. "What happened? Is he—"

"Calm down, kiddo," said Sirius as he led Harry towards the den. "He's in here." He pushed the door open to reveal Remus lying down on a couch with a blanket. He looked tired and worn out, sicker and paler and a little more fragile than he had been when Harry had seen him last. His eyes were closed and his breathing was ragged, and when he shifted slightly he winced a little, as though the action pained him. The fire illuminated a few fresh scars and bruises on his skin. Harry wasn't even aware that he'd stopped to stare until Sirius gave him a gentle push. "Go on," he said. "He's awake, it's alright."

Having apparently heard Sirius' voice, Remus stirred and opened his eyes to look at Harry, who walked towards the sofa. "Hey, Moony," he whispered, feeling that the situation demanded quiet.

Remus gave him a faint smile and gestured for him to take a seat next to him.

"How are you feeling?" He asked softly.

"I'm fine." Remus said hoarsely. "Just a bit tired." Harry must have looked a bit doubtful, for the werewolf began to chuckle a bit—it was a harsh noise, and it sounded painful, no doubt because his throat was sore from howling. Harry wanted to hug the man to let him know how worried he was, but Remus looked so weak that Harry felt that he, with the little strength the child had, might hurt him.

Some of this must have shown on the child's face, because Remus reached out a hand. Harry took it, holding it gently.

"It hurt really bad." Harry said. It wasn't a question.

"I'm fine." Remus repeated, trying to reassure Harry. "I've done this hundreds of times, Harry."

"I know," said Harry, squeezing his eyes shut. "I know."

"I'll be okay. I've got Sirius. And you."

Harry opened his eyes and smiled. It wasn't his usual lopsided grin, but a sweet, happy little thing—he lowered his head slowly, softly and leaned on Remus' chest.

"Yeah. You've got me."

A/N: Finally, the full moon chapter you've all been waiting for (or maybe not...:D!) Little Harry is adorable, isn't he? Oh, and for the record, some of your guesses are getting a little too close for comfort...back off, will you, you're making me nervous...:P

Anyway, I had one of those moron moments—you know what I mean, when you do something really stupid and don't realize it 'till later—and I originally had the date set so it was approaching Thanksgiving. Well, very-american-me didn't realize that there is obviously no Thanksgiving in England (which stinks—I'm a huge fan of turkey and mashed potatoes.:P), so I had to go back and change all of the dates so it was approaching Christmas instead. Thanks so much to jayley and Laughing for catching my mistake!

Thanks again for everything, you guys! You make writing this so much easier!

Moonfyre

Fifteen—Gotcha

(December 19, 1987)

Remus wasn't able to leave the house again for three days afterwards. Harry was dreading it, because he and Sirius had a lot of fun with the werewolf around. Although there weren't many active games to be played, and certainly no snowball fights because Remus was still recovering, there were plenty of jokes and card games, stories, books, a few board games and many laughs. Treasure Island had been finished and The Borrowers was begun, Harry finally taught Sirius how to make a lasagna (although it took a surprising amount of tries; the latter had a knack for burning things. Devlin had stolen the final product when it had been set out to cool, however, and of course no one wanted any after that). Remus had been discovered to be a rather brilliant artist and was teaching Harry to draw a horse, which was proving more difficult than the child had first thought, Harry and Sirius had begun force feeding Remus his medicine and Sirius had cheated twenty-three known times at a card game Harry had taught them. All in all it had been a rather fun three days.

But all good things come to an end, and it was with a certain degree of sadness that Sirius and Harry said their goodbyes as he left for his first day back at work. And they watched despondently as he disappeared into the emerald flames in the fireplace once more.

Harry stared as the tall green flames fizzled out of existence. "I wish he could have stayed home longer," he said.

Sirius reached over and grabbed Harry's shoulder, pulling him into a one-armed hug. "We'll see him later today, kiddo."

"I know. But it's not the same as seeing him all day." Sirius said nothing, staring at the fireplace as well until Harry pulled him out of his trance. "Well," the boy said, "what will we do today."

"I don't know. We could play cards."

"Nah. We did that all day yesterday."

“You could finish drawing that horse of yours.”

Harry stuck out his tongue, grinning. “No thanks. I’ve given up on ever becoming an artist.”

“We could go outside. It looks nice out today.”

At this, Harry looked thoughtful. He flopped down on the sofa and tilted his head to one side. “Yes. Let’s go outside, but...can we go back to the shops again? For the last time, I mean. And just quickly, so we can buy Remus some books for Christmas. We’re nearly finished all the good muggle ones, and it’ll be a good surprise. Of course, we’ll tell him where we went if he asks—which he will—but he won’t mind on Christmas. And this will be the last time, so he won’t be mad, not really. I had so much fun last time, and Devlin and I really do need to go out, and—”

“Whoa, Harry,” Sirius said, holding up his hands. “You can stop. You had me at ‘Can we go back to the shops again’.” He grinned, and Harry laughed.

“You’re corrupting me, you know. Remus said so.” Harry declared as they started up the stairs.

“Oh? Is that so?”

“Yep. Remus said you’re incorrigible. Before, I wouldn’t have even thought of disobeying Remus’ orders, and now I’m asking you to. Spending all day with you did it, too. You’re so bad it had to rub off on me eventu—aah!” Harry said as Sirius tried to grab him. He giggled and ran towards his bedroom only to fall on the floor as his godfather tackled him and began to tickle him. “Sirius—aack! No, I have to...haha...get dressed!”

“Not until you’re punished for insulting your guardian,” Sirius laughed, still tickling him.

“Okay, okay!” Harry squealed, trying to wriggle out of Sirius’ grasp. “I’m sorry for saying you’re bad and incorrigible and insane.”

Sirius grinned and stood up. "Apology accepted...but you didn't say I was insane."

"Yes, I did," said Harry, edging towards his bedroom. "This morning. To Remus." He laughed and hurriedly shut and locked the door before Sirius had even realized what he said. The animagus pounded on the door. "I'll get you for this, Potter," he mock-growled, then grinned, "and your little dog, too."

Harry just laughed from inside the door.

It was a little warmer that day. The sun was struggling to shine through the thick clouds, but the day was beautiful nevertheless. The marketplace was considerably less crowded—it was midmorning on a weekday, after all—and Sirius, Harry, and Devlin could actually walk without shoving their way through walls of people.

Sirius grinned happily as he passed each brightly lit shop. The snow on the sidewalk was packed down by many footsteps and Harry playfully crunched it beneath his feet. It was starting to snow a bit now, but only a little, hardly enough to even worry about. Besides, the crisp air made him feel better, and it seemed to do the same for Harry, for the boy suddenly laughed and spun in circles, sticking his tongue out to try and catch the snowflakes. Sirius couldn't help but join him, and in their fit of sudden giddiness they danced all around the sidewalk for a while, jumping and laughing and yelling in spite of people's stares.

A few moments later they were in the bookstore, slightly out of breath but still smiling. They were peering around for any books Remus might like. The shopkeeper eyed Devlin suspiciously—he was trailing behind them, looking quite pleased because he had another chocolate ball in his mouth—but apparently pets were allowed in most of the shops.

"What kind of muggle books does he like?" Sirius said out of the corner of his mouth. "There's a million books in here!"

"Any sort, really," said Harry, already walking over to one of the many towering bookshelves. "but he likes the magic sort best—the muggles

usually get it all wrong, but it's still fun to read them. Sometimes he likes the science fiction as well..." he trailed off at the stare Sirius was giving him. "What?"

"Oh, no, Harry!" Sirius moaned in despair. "He's turning you into one of them!"

"One of who?"

Sirius glanced around the bookstore as though he half-expected to see someone peering around one of the shelves. "A bookworm." He announced in a stage-whisper.

Harry just giggled and pushed Sirius away, then sighed. "But I really don't know, other than a big, general idea of what kind he likes...it seems like he's got everything he wants. What else does he need?"

"A book on shapeshifters," Sirius said, eyeing his raven-haired godson who blushed scarlet and looked determinedly away. Sirius chuckled. "But really, Harry, he'll like anything you get him. Just pick out a few books."

"Alright." Harry sighed, blush fading. He busied himself for the next fifteen minutes or so picking out books to buy. When he finally finished, Sirius was sitting on the floor leaning against a bookshelf and pretending to be asleep. Harry laughed. "I get the point, Sirius," he said, gently kicking his godfather in mid-fake-snore.

"It's about time," Sirius yawned.

He paid for the books and the customer bell jingled as Harry opened the door to leave; he handed the bag to Sirius and took off down the sidewalk, playing in the flurries of snow, determined to have as much fun outside as he possibly could until they went back to the Safehouse for good. Devlin followed, his charge's happiness spreading to him as he barked and chased Harry in circles, stopping occasionally to chase his tail. Harry grinned and ran from shop to shop, peering through the windows of the stores and occasionally waving at the people inside. He ran from Devlin, yelling, "Come on!" through his laughter. The man in question shook his head; for the

moment, he was just content to keep an eye on Harry through the falling snow.

"Don't go too far," he called, and Harry nodded, yelping as Devlin began to lick him.

Neither had noticed the widening eyes of the keeper of the candy shop, or the horrified look that comes with a terrible realization, or the way he frantically picked up the phone and began to dial...

Sirius called Harry back once or twice, whenever the child strayed too far, and then, all at once, Sirius tore his gaze away from the window of a bakery and Harry was nowhere to be seen.

The first moment of panic was the worst, because complete fear overtook him, nearly paralyzing him. Harry was gone, for sure—someone had seen him, had recognized him, or—

Calm down, Sirius, he told himself. Harry's just running around. He'll be back, then I'll talk to him...

A few seconds passed, seconds that felt like an eternity. He looked around at the people walking happily, snow-dusted heads passing him by. He couldn't exactly call Harry's name—if the child hadn't been recognized, that might draw too much attention...

He was standing quite plainly in the middle of the sidewalk, head turning in every direction to look for the little dark-haired child when something pointy jabbed him in the back. "Don't move, Black," a voice said—the bag of books fell to the ground, forgotten—"You're surrounded in every direction; cause a scene and we stun you. We can do this the easy way or the hard way. Now walk forward to that alley," it said, and a hand gestured to one of the many narrow alleyways between the shops.

Sirius obeyed, mind racing. Where was Harry? Did they have him already? Would they send him back to the Dursleys again? Was—

Wait. There he was, a little boy on the corner, clearly lost in the crowd, bright emerald eyes searching. He had one arm on Devlin's head for

comfort; the dog walked close to his charge, as if to show that he would offer him whatever protection he could. And then his eyes fell on Sirius, a smile flickered...and faded. He blinked at the man guiding his godfather, stopping and frowning.

Sirius risked shifting a little to reveal the wand that was digging into his back. The shapeshifter's eyes widened, and Sirius mouthed, "Run."

Harry shook his head, fear in his eyes.

They had reached the alley. "Now." Sirius mouthed quickly. "Hurry."

"Stupefy." A voice said, and everything faded to black.

Harry bolted. For a few seconds, he was in a state of total panic—he knew nothing but the feel of the cement beneath his feet, feeling his shoes pound against it with every stride. The wind brushing his hair back, toying with the hem of his jacket. Snow in his eyes. Devlin panting behind him, the murmur and chatter of the crowd. The tears coursing steadily down his cheeks. And then, after a minute or so, the burning of his lungs. He slowed down to a jog, and started to calm himself down. Okay, he thought, Remus. I have to talk to Remus.

"Hey!" a voice called suddenly. Harry spun around quickly to see someone racing towards him. A strange man with dark brown hair and a rather bulky build.

"Kid, it's okay. I'm not going to hurt you—wait, come back!"

Harry had begun to run again. The crowds were too thin; there weren't enough people on the street to shield him from view for long. And he was tired, and much, much slower than a fully-trained Auror. He could hear the man's shouts get closer and closer. He chanced a quick glimpse behind him—there were two now, and now three, all of them too close for comfort. And he was wiped out, starting to slow.

What would happen if they caught him? He'd probably be back at the Dursleys in a heartbeat. And who would contact Remus if he was caught? He was one of the only people who knew of his godfather's

innocence, and if they caught him now they'd probably think Sirius had lied to him, Harry, or that Sirius had bewitched him. Either way, they wouldn't believe him, and he'd be back at the Dursleys with no way to help anyone.

Maybe it was luck, then—in his moment of despair, he saw a crowd of people outside the corner toy store, the one that was always crowded. He turned so fast that he stumbled and nearly fell; he righted himself quickly, turning to make sure that Devlin was behind him, and raced towards the store. He shoved people aside with all the strength he had, not caring about their angry mutters or yells, he didn't have time to care—he ran to the back of the store and slid to one side, ducking behind a shelf full of stuffed animals and such. As Devlin skidded to a stop behind him, he panted, “A moth!”

The dark-haired man hurried into the store, a number of Aurors at his back. “Hurry,” he muttered, “he’s cornered!” The lot of them searched the store, roughly grabbing several children who looked vaguely like their target before apologizing to the look-a-likes. Neither boy nor dog was anywhere to be found. The man impatiently swatted away a dark moth that fluttered past his face, and watched as another quivered to his right before flying away.

“They must have ditched us—come on!”

He was running again, but this time he was in the shade of the trees in the woods. The Safehouse was in view now, and in a moment he came out into the clearing and ran to the door, feeling the familiar tingle that meant that the wards recognized him. He reached the door and was inside in a flash, shedding his wet, snow-covered clothes and wincing as Devlin shook himself dry.

He felt like pulling out his hair. “I have to talk to Remus...but what do I do?” He looked at the fireplace. “No,” he said to himself, “Remus said they’d shut off all the fireplaces there except the Headmaster’s for safety, and I can’t exactly floo there. And I can’t—”

The fire suddenly turned an emerald green; Devlin tugged Harry behind the sofa, just in case. The child sat with his back to it,

watching the green light dance on the far wall. When it finally receded, a familiar voice called, “Harry?”

The boy in question popped out from behind the sofa. “Remus,” he said in obvious relief. “Remus! We went to the market—I know we weren’t supposed to—but Sirius got caught, and I ran—”

“I know, I know. They have him locked up at Hogwarts. How Dumbledore persuaded Fudge to do that I have no idea—but they’re going mad because you’re missing. They’ve got Sirius under a truth potion right now, they’ll be here any minute! You have to hide at my place!”

“I can’t, I want to help—and what about you? And I thought no one could get into the Safehouse—”

“Dumbledore helped Lily and James to re-ward it once; he might have a way to get them in—but just go, Harry! I only just managed to get away for a moment. Here,” he said, handing him the floo powder. “Say Wolfden Cottage and stay there. I’ll be back for you later. Go!”

Harry grabbed Devlin’s collar and obeyed, but not without a sad glance at Remus, who motioned for him to hurry, and then he was gone.

A/N: From now on things are getting harder, and I’m trying to make sure I tie up all of the loose ends and to make sure everything makes sense. If I make any mistakes with something let me know! Also, I just have to say I’m sorry about the “I’ll get you and your little dog too” part in the beginning of the chapter—I doubt Sirius would have ever seen or read The Wizard of Oz, but after I had put in Sirius saying “I’ll get you” I just couldn’t help but put the rest in...:P

Thanks to my reviewers—I love reading your reviews! It’s like a drug or something!

Oh, I almost forgot! If you get the chance, go and read one of moonshine369’s stories—she’s my little sister, and she’s got some cute Lily/James stuff up—she’s a hardcore LJ shipper! Go check it out!

Anyway, review!

Moonfyre

Sixteen—Saving Sirius

(December 19, 1987)

When Remus floored to Wolfden nearly an hour later, Harry was sitting on the couch, hugging Devlin with his face pressed into the dog's side. His small shoulders were shaking, and every now and then he choked out a small sob.

"Oh, Harry," Remus breathed, rushing over to sit beside him on the sofa. He wrapped an arm around the boy's small shoulders and pulled him so that the child was leaning against him. Harry wrapped his arms around the werewolf, who rubbed comforting circles on his back.

"What now?" Harry sobbed. "What happens to Sirius?"

Remus was silent for a moment. "We were lucky." He said finally. "They were only able to ask a few questions...they can't interrogate him fully until they're authorized. They asked where you were, and how to get into the house, and that sort of thing. They searched the Safehouse and found your stuff, and they think you've run off on your own. You can stay here. I think you'll be okay."

"But what about Sirius?" Harry pressed, eyes wide.

"They sentenced him to the Dementor's Kiss." Remus whispered.

Harry blinked. "The Kiss?"

"The dementors. They're going to suck his soul out."

For a moment, Harry didn't do anything. It sounded absolutely ridiculous. "Suck his soul out?"

Remus pressed his lips together and nodded curtly.

"But...what do you...?"

"Sirius will still be alive, but he won't be able to do anything, to move...he'll just be an empty shell...he'll be there, but he won't—" Harry suddenly burst into sobs again. Sirius' fate seemed insane—and impossible—but Harry couldn't help but be afraid for Sirius. He had just seen his godfather this morning; they couldn't do that. Sirius couldn't become...empty. That would be almost worse than death.

The werewolf continued to rub comforting circles into his back. After a few moments, however, he gently moved Harry aside and stood slowly. "I have to go," he whispered reluctantly. "I have to do something...I don't know what." He murmured. "But there must be something. I'll be back, Harry. Just...stay here," The werewolf's eyes were slightly unfocused, and he appeared to be dazed as he stumbled to the fireplace and disappeared in a rush of green flames.

Harry watched the fire turn back to normal, still half-aware that tears were running down his cheeks. Devlin huddled next to him, whimpering a little in unison with his charge. Harry shook his head into the dog's fur, overcome by the paralyzing fear that he would never see his godfather again. Or at least that he would never see his godfather in the same way—able to think, to move, to live.

He shuddered, and shook his head to clear his thoughts. "There is something we can do." He said softly, and he hurriedly rubbed the tears from his cheeks. "There must be something."

Hugging his knees, Harry stared into the fireplace. He was suddenly and completely aware of the time that passed, knowing that he had to act quickly if he wanted to help Sirius. He sat there for what seemed like hours, furrowing his brow in thought as he formulated a plan, dispensing ideas and changing his schemes where necessary. He started suddenly at the completion of his plan, blinking as a mixture of fear and anxiety shot through him. "Come on, Devlin," he said slowly, taking a deep breath as he hopped off of the couch. "I've got an idea. We have to go save Sirius."

Devlin huffed.

Sirius had always hated waiting, but this was the worst. The seconds stretched on into minutes, which stretched into hours, which stretched

into eternity. He was waiting, just waiting to die. No, not that—he wasn't lucky enough for death. In a little while, he would be swallowed by the unfathomable cold...

He didn't even want to think about it. The animagus sat near a window in what he assumed was one of the professors' offices. He was huddled on a wooden bench with his knees pulled to his chest and his head in his hands. He was the epitome of despair—everything that had happened in the last few days, everything he had done was wasted. He had finally met his godson, and he had finally given in to the dreams that had begun to plague his mind—dreams that his name would one day be cleared and he would be free to do whatever he wanted to do, to walk the streets without fearing that someone would recognize him, to be the family that Harry needed ...

But that time was over now. He was going to die—no, worse than that—and it was all his stupid fault. If they hadn't gone to the village, if only they hadn't...and what about Harry? He didn't even know if the child had been caught, although in all probability an Auror had chased him down. And Harry would go back to the Dursleys, to those hateful, spiteful little...

Not if Remus did something about it though. Now that Harry had finally met Remus and obviously knew about the wizarding world, maybe Dumbledore would try to pull a few strings at the Ministry, and maybe, just maybe...

Sirius's heart nearly leapt out of his chest when he heard someone fiddle with the doorknob, and the key turning in the lock—Oh God, he thought to himself, here it comes.

But when the door opened, the animagus heaved a genuine sigh of relief. "Remus," he breathed, "You—"

"I just—" Remus interrupted, looking more disheveled and disheartened than Sirius had ever seen him. "I snuck around the guards. I needed to come and see you before..." he trailed off.

The animagus drew a long, shuddering breath and tried to keep his composure. He stood, hugging his friend tightly. "That's good. I needed to see you as well."

Neither of them moved for several moments, until Remus finally pushed away. "Sirius," he said, "I'm just going to tell them the truth. What you told me, about Pettigrew and—"

He stopped when Sirius shook his head sadly. "No, Remus. That's why I needed to talk to you. You can't."

"Sirius, if I don't—well—I don't know what else to do." Remus said softly. Sirius had never seen the werewolf at a loss for words, nor had he seen the werewolf out of ideas. Remus was in too close to the situation to figure out what else could be done.

"There's nothing you can do. We've got no proof," Sirius said.

"There must be—"

"Listen. Just...take care of Harry, okay? That's all I want for you to do, and they won't let you if you've had some sort of...some kind of conspiracy with me. I don't care what it takes, just convince Dumbledore to let you take Harry in. He deserves better than the Dursleys, and that's where he'll go if you don't get him."

Remus was silent, amber eyes staring at his friend. "I can't believe this. It's not supposed to be this way."

"Yeah, well. Not everything turns out how you want, I guess."

The werewolf looked at Sirius carefully, and then a rather determined expression covered his features. "I won't let it end this way, Sirius. I'll find something. Anything."

Sirius gave his friend a weak smile as the werewolf pulled him into another hug. "Thanks." he said softly.

Remus pulled away again and opened the door, turning back slightly. "Goodbye," he said, neither of them wanting to admit that it was

probably their last farewell. The werewolf's eyes glimmered for a moment, though Sirius couldn't tell whether it was because of tears or because of the moonlight streaming through the window.

"Goodbye," Sirius murmured.

And with that, Sirius's best friend left him once more to hopelessly ponder his fate.

Remus all but ran to the Hogwarts Library—it had always been his refuge, a place he could go to think...and desperately needed somewhere to think right now. He hurried along the dark hallways, half-surprised that he could remember which way to go after all these years. Up the stairs, to the left...he rounded the last corner—

—only to nearly run into a rather thin, spindly-looking woman with large glasses that made her eyes seem enormous and a rather odd looking shawl.

"Erm, hello," Remus said, stopping abruptly so as not to crash into the small woman. "Sorry about that," he said quickly, beginning to move away.

The woman shifted to the side slightly to block his path. "I thought I would find someone here." The woman said in a soft, misty voice. "My Inner Eye saw you earlier today."

Remus blinked. "Er, if you don't mind, I'm in quite a hurry, so..."

"Yes, of course, dear." the woman sighed faintly. "I knew you would be."

"Excuse me, but who are you, exactly?" Remus asked, being uncharacteristically rude—he rather felt that the situation warranted some degree of disrespect.

"Sibyll Trelawney. The Divination Professor, naturally." She adjusted her glasses, her eyes seeming slightly smaller for a moment, before she pushed them backwards and they grew to their original size. Remus suddenly remembered his manners.

"I'm Remus—"

“—Lupin. Of course.” Remus looked at her oddly, and she gave him a silvery smile. “Though I hardly journey downstairs—the hustle and bustle clouds my Eye, you see—even I have heard of the famous Remus Lupin, who will stop at nothing to get young Harry Potter back.”

“Ah. Right. Well, er—I need to be going, then.” Remus said, hoping to get away from the spooky little woman.

Trelawney stepped to the side, allowing the man to pass. He brushed by her, feeling her eyes on his back. He was almost to the library doors when he heard her misty voice call back to him.

“I believe you are fated find what you need in that library, Mr. Lupin. And what your friend needs as well.”

Remus turned around quickly, wonderingly. The strange Sibyll Trelawney was walking away, her shawl fluttering slightly behind her.

A/N: I am going to say it right now: DON'T ask me why they didn't stun or petrify Sirius. I have no legitimate answer, other than that a conscious Sirius was much easier to work with than an unconscious one. Also, I know there are probably some Trelawney haters out there, but for the record, I think she's hilarious and I love her, so I stuck her in. Hope you don't mind!.:P

Anyway, since I made you guys wait so long and since this chapter was pretty slow, I'm putting chapter 17 up too—go check it out!

Moonfyre

Seventeen—In Which More Things Go Wrong

(December 19, 1987, late afternoon)

Harry stood in the snow just outside of the village. He wore one of Remus' heavy coats that fell almost to his knees, his own snow boots that had sunk deeply into the white snow, a blue scarf to cover his nose and mouth, and a hat to cover his trademark hair and scar. It was still snowing, so Harry hoped that these clothes would help disguise him, and that he wouldn't arouse suspicion because he was just a kid traveling on his own. Well, Devlin was with him at any rate, but that didn't help much.

He murmured to himself, "This had better work," and he stuck out his right arm and waved it for a few seconds. He paused, hand frozen in the air, before waving it even more wildly.

Nothing happened. He sighed, "It's no use, I guess, Devlin. I don't even have a wand, so it must not—"

There was a loud bang, and Harry threw up his hands to shield his eyes against the sudden blinding light. He quickly took a few steps backwards, nearly stumbling in the snow, and then an enormous, purple, triple-decker bus screeched to a halt in front of him.

The Knight Bus.

Harry couldn't help but smile beneath his scarf, thankful that it had worked, thankful that he'd remembered one of Sirius's many stories about the marauders...

A conductor with short grey hair and a slightly squashed-looking nose stepped out of the bus and recited, "Welcome to the Knight Bus, emergency transport for the stranded witch or wizard. Just stick out your wand hand, step on board—" here he swept one arm towards the door to indicate that Harry should step into the bus, "—and we can take you anywhere you want to go. My name is Jerry, and I will be your conductor this evening."

"Thanks," Harry said. "Um, can my dog come too? He's really well-behaved, and—"

"Sure, sure," Jerry said. "You travelin' alone, kid?"

"Yes, sir," Harry said politely. Jerry looked at him curiously, so Harry continued, ready. "I'm going to see my aunt in Hogsmeade, but Mum's a bit ill—she decided to stay home in bed."

Jerry nodded, and Harry inwardly sighed in relief. "Okay, kid. What's your name?"

"Er...James...James Evans," said Harry, thinking quickly.

"Well, Jim, it'll cost ya 'leven Sickles to git to Hogsmeade."

Harry pushed his hand into his pocket, searched for the money he had hurriedly "borrowed" from Remus, and thrust it forward. Jerry collected them and gestured for Harry to have a seat. The man shouted something and the double-decker suddenly sped forward again with a loud bang, and Harry fell back and landed rather ungracefully on the floor. Devlin whined grumpily, having skidded into a few chairs, and Harry shakily pulled himself into his chair and, not wanting to draw any more attention to himself, proceeded to hang onto the side of the bus for the duration of the journey.

When the Knight Bus had finally come to a sudden halt at their destination, Harry all but dragged Devlin towards the door, thanked Jerry and the bus driver, and stepped to the ground. The double-decker gave a loud bang behind him and sped off.

"That was horrible," he muttered to Devlin as he took a deep breath, "and I hope we'll never have to do it again." With Devlin licking the back of his hand reassuringly, Harry took a good look at his surroundings.

This village, Hogsmeade, looked wonderful in the dying rays of the sun. The street Harry stood on presently was a bit slanted and slightly narrow, but on each side were brightly-lit shops with wreaths and holly and Christmas trees. The snow made everything picturesque,

the finishing touch to a beautiful scene that looked like it could have been painted. In Harry's eyes, however, the beauty of the town was laced with desperation. The slanting sunlight from the sunset reminded him that he had no time to lose: the clock was ticking and he needed to move quickly.

"Excuse me, sir," he exclaimed, stopping the first person who he came by. "Can you tell me the way to Honeydukes?"

The man, a sprightly old gentleman with an armful of packages that tipped dangerously, gave Harry directions and tottered off towards a store behind them. Harry followed the man's instructions and found himself at the door of Honeydukes a few moments later.

Sirius had been right. Honeydukes was a million times better than anything Harry had ever seen. As Harry stepped into the shop, he was bombarded by the delicious, fragrant smells that wafted through the air. Candies of every shape and size imaginable, of every flavor and texture anyone could think of, decorated the entire store. There were quite a few candies Harry had heard Sirius mention, like Bertie Bott's Every Flavor Beans, Sugar Quills, and Drooble's Best Blowing Gum, and many more, like Ice Mice or Jelly Slugs, that Harry had never heard of.

But presently, Harry snapped out of his trance and wondered where exactly the cellar was. Sirius had never specified the exact location of the door, but Harry assumed it was the one behind the counter. His suspicions were confirmed when he approached the counter a moment later. "Brennan," a woman said, ringing up some candy, "go down and grab a few boxes of Whizbees, will you? We're nearly out."

A man who had been sitting in a chair and reading *The Daily Prophet* grumbled, "All right, all right." And he disappeared into the door. Harry made sure that the woman's back was still turned, ducked down, and slipped into the door, glancing back to make sure Devlin was behind him.

He slid down the stairs in complete silence. They reached the bottom and Devlin cocked his ears forward to listen for any sound of movement in front of them, and Harry followed his lead. Suddenly, to

their left, there was a quiet shuffling sound like footsteps made by someone wearing heavy boots. Harry grabbed Devlin's collar and quickly jumped backwards behind an enormous wooden crate—just in time, as well, because the worker, Brennan, came out with a few boxes in his arms. His footsteps soon retreated up the stairs and the door slammed shut, leaving them in semidarkness.

The shapeshifter immediately fell to his hands and knees, searching for the crack of the trapdoor in the dim light. After a few moments of seeing nothing to hint at the secret passageway below, Harry began to worry that Sirius had been mistaken, and after another double-check he began to get nervous. But he was sure Sirius had said the passageway was under Honeydukes, right? He began to rap lightly on the floor, moving from place to place. He glanced upstairs from time to time, hoping that no one would come down again. Devlin was looking at him oddly, and the seconds ticked on, but he then rapped on the floor and heard a strange, hollow noise, as if the sound was echoing through a chamber below.

Moving quickly, he felt for the trapdoor and touched the crack, a line so thin that it blended in perfectly with the floor and was completely unnoticeable in the dim light. In his excitement he flung the door open, making a little more noise than was warranted in the situation, gestured to Devlin, and started down the stairs, shutting the trapdoor behind him.

The chamber was narrow and low, and as soon as he shut the door a thick darkness rolled over him, suffocating him. "Devlin?" he whispered, and his voice carried down the passageway, getting softer with each echo. Devlin butted his head against Harry's waist and the boy grasped his collar, afraid to let it go. The other hand he placed on the wall, and the pair slowly began to descend the stairs.

They reached the bottom and continued to creep forward, stumbling occasionally in the darkness. The passage twisted one way and turned another, and they seemed to still be going downwards. In Harry's imagination, the shadowy darkness writhed around him, changing now into a fearsome ogre, then into something far worse. He whimpered involuntarily, gripping Devlin's collar more tightly. The dog remained at ease in the hallway, but led his master at a slightly

faster pace. After a time, Harry closed his eyes, and although there was no change in the intensity of the darkness, it seemed to Harry that the monsters could not form beneath his eyelids, and he breathed a little easier.

After what felt like ages, Harry heard Devlin's claws scratch against something more solid than the damp earth, and a second later his boot hit something hard. He opened his eyes, though it made no difference, and stooped over to touch it. After feeling around for a moment, he judged it to be a stone slide, of sorts. It was narrow enough so that Harry could press one hand against either side of it to help him climb up. After a minute or so of steady climbing, they wrestled their way out of the hole and fell out of the statue and onto the stone floor of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

Sturgis Podmore angrily waved away a little black moth, grumbling as he did so. He had never liked bugs. Or executions, for that matter. Yet here he was, pacing outside the room where Black was being held, waiting for someone to tell him it was time to bring the prisoner down. The entire situation was making him feel uneasy—if Black had escaped from Azkaban, how could they possibly expect to keep him anywhere else?—and he wanted nothing more than to have a firewhiskey in his hands to help soothe his nerves. Or better yet, he wanted someone else to have his job.

He knew for sure that he wouldn't be able to rest easy until Black had been executed—the man had been haunting his mind ever since the convict had kidnapped the little Potter boy. It would be better when he was dead; it would take a load off of everyone's minds. And he, Podmore, was rather nervous that the small office would hold Black for long. But then, Podmore argued with himself, we all know he's a dog thanks to that Lupin fellow. There's hardly any chance of him escaping. All the same, Podmore felt his hand being drawn to the pocket where the key to the door was; he took it out and looked at his hand.

He fingered the key, as though he needed to see and feel it to make sure it was there, that it was safe. If the key was safe, Black was still inside the—

Something very hard struck him hard on the back of his head, and he fell into darkness.

Harry fumbled with the key, but got it into the lock at last and turned it quickly. He flung open the door to see Sirius sitting near a tiny window. His godfather's head turned sharply towards him; his godfather's eyes widened and he stood suddenly, shaking his head as though he could hardly believe what he saw.

"Harry?" he said, and as if coming out of a trance he rushed forward. "Harry! What are you doing here? You can't—!"

"We've come to help, Sirius," said Harry, and he saw his godfather's eyes flicker towards the door where Devlin was standing guard. The dog looked toward him, huffed, and turned away. "You have to get out of here, we haven't much time." He began to pull the man out of the room.

"But Harry, you can't possibly expect me to sneak downstairs with all the Aurors—"

"I don't. I will make a distraction, and you will go upstairs." The shapeshifter said firmly.

"Upstairs? But I don't—"

"Come on, Sirius! I can't explain it all now!" said Harry, cutting the man off again when he heard someone approaching. "Follow Devlin. And be careful."

"I can't leave—"

"GO!" Harry hissed, and he turned, listening as Sirius' footsteps died away and someone else's came steadily forward. He shifted, and not one second too soon, for someone rounded the corner—

He bolted, catching a glimpse of the man's shocked face as he flashed past. His now-sharp ears caught the man's stammer of disbelief, and then he was running after Harry, shouting, "Black's escaped! He's a dog! He's—" down many flights of stairs, up and

down corridors the man chased him, and others began to follow as well. Spells were cast in his direction, but his keen ears heard the almost-silent whoosh of magic and he dodged them easily. He raced up and down stairways, through corridors and hallways, and jumped across moving staircases, hoping he could find his way out. Several moments later, he felt that he must be nearly out by now, having been a bit lost and confused and having run in circles a while ago. He was exhausted, and it was pure luck that he found the entrance hall when he did, seeing the towering doors Sirius had spoken of. He ran for the door, dodging spell left and right and—

—“Oof!” someone caught him. The man had run around a table and cut him off just before the door; his grip was tight and forceful.

Uh oh. Harry thought. This wasn't part of the plan.

Remus sat in the library, silently pacing the floor, his thoughts swirling around in his mind at an unprecedented rate. He was inwardly searching for something, anything he could do short of breaking Sirius out himself; there was no way he could do it alone with all the Aurors and Order members patrolling the place. Perhaps it was because of his panicked state of mind or perhaps it was because he was too close to the person he most needed to save, but Remus didn't have a single idea. Never in his entire life had he felt so helpless. So much for fate and divination, he thought to himself. That Trelawney person must be a fraud after all...

But as it happened, fate smiled upon Remus even as he scorned her, sending some help in the form of one Arthur Weasley. The man in question opened the door to the Library suddenly, and a loud creak echoed in the room and startled the werewolf out of his thoughts.

“Oh, hello, Remus,” said Arthur, looking slightly surprised that anyone was inside. “I suppose you needed a bit of a break, too?”

“Something like that.” Remus said, a bit tiredly. He raged internally at being forced to make polite conversation at a time like this, at being forced to act natural when time was running out.

He quickly tried to think of something to say. "How's Molly doing?" He finally asked with a small sigh.

"She's doing great. It's been quiet without Bill and Charlie in the house—they've been at Hogwarts, of course—but Fred and George are driving her crazy to make up for it."

Remus smiled tightly. "Troublemakers, are they?"

"You have no idea." he said, settling into a chair. Remus winced, thinking that he would have to find a way to cut their conversation short. "And Molly insists on having all of them home for the holidays. Pity their pets have to come as well, though. Bill's owl annoys Percy's rat, and Fred and George always have animals in the house. Toads and squirrels and cats. It's annoying, really, all the hissing and screeching and such. But Percy—"

"Wait a second, wait a second," said Remus—the rat was probably nothing, but he felt he should make sure...and maybe Trelawney's odd statement meant...

"What does this rat look like?"

"Scabbers?" asked Arthur, eyeing Remus oddly, "He looks like a rat. You know, grayish white, long tail whiskers, four paws—"

"Would he happen to be missing a toe?"

Now Arthur was looking at Remus more oddly than ever. "How did you know?" he asked.

Remus's eyes widened and he stood quickly, making Arthur start. "Never mind that. Would you mind terribly if I saw him for a moment?"

"Remus...what are...you on about?" Arthur panted, having chased Remus as the werewolf sprinted all the way back to Dumbledore's office. They had finally stopped at the gargoyle that marked the entrance to the Headmaster's room, panting and trying to catch their breaths.

"I'll explain...at your house," said Remus, still slightly out of breath,
"But—"

They became aware of footsteps behind them, and both men turned to see four people carrying a rather large cage, followed by a group of Aurors and old Order members.

Sirius! Remus yelled inwardly. What have you done?

The black dog in the cage was barking madly, pushing its paws against the sides. "What happened?" Remus asked the nearest Auror as someone murmured the password to the gargoyle.

"Someone hit Podmore in the back of the head." The Auror said. "He never saw who. But Black got out and ran for the door. Lucky we caught him just before. But the Anti-Animagus Charm isn't working on him."

Remus blinked. Why wouldn't...oh. Oh no. He quickly looked to the dog again, and to his horror he saw bright green eyes.

The werewolf wanted to curse loudly, but, using all of his self-control, he turned to Arthur instead. "I need to see Scabbers. Now."

Harry whimpered, now pacing restlessly in the cage, then cowering backwards in a corner when someone stepped closer to peer at him. There were far too many people around him, poking and prodding him with their wands.

"There's got to be another Anti-Animagus Charm we can use."

"A couple people left with Emmeline to look for one in the library."

"But maybe there's another kind of—"

"Why bother, though? We don't need to change him back. We can still give him the Kiss."

"Oh, right."

And someone was sent away, presumably to fetch a dementor, and the room fell silent. Harry was only too aware of many pairs of eyes on him, following his every move. He tried to make himself as small as he could possibly get, and he huddled back into a corner and closed his eyes tightly.

The Dementor's Kiss. He was going to die. No, worse. His soul would be sucked out and devoured by a monster, leaving his empty body behind. No. He thought. I don't want to die. I don't want to die. He was no hero, no strong, brave man who could face death without fear. He was no warrior who could...He was just a boy. A small, frightened boy who wasn't ready to die. He was shaking.

But all I have to do is shift back, he thought, opening his eyes. Sirius must have escaped by now—

But Sirius had not left Hogwarts, Harry suddenly realized. His godfather's head was in the window, staring right back at him. Harry was the first to catch a glimpse of him—with everyone's eyes focused on him, Harry, no one else had spotted his godfather yet, but it would only take a second, just a second for one of them to turn their head and see him. Get out of here! Harry thought to himself. Now, before—

The door opened and the dementor entered.

A/N: Sorry about the cliffhanger! Poor Harry's in trouble now, isn't he?.:)

Whew! Anyway, thanks to everyone who reviewed, I hope you liked both chapters (I was very proud of myself for writing so much lol!) and don't forget to review!

Moonfyre

Eighteen—More Revelations

(December 19, 1987)

He had never seen a dementor before, and now that he had gotten his first taste of one he hoped never to see one again. Nothing could have prepared him for the creature that steadily glided nearer to the cage. It wore a long, dark cloak, so Harry was spared the sight of most of its features, but a sense of total fear began to overpower him just the same. He could hear its slow, rattling breath; he caught a glimpse of a slimy, grey, deadened hand that hovered just behind the fold of its cloak; he could feel the cold get closer and closer, wrapping around him like a blanket, squeezing the life out of him, until it penetrated his skin, until it crept inside of him...He swam in a thick fog, unable to see or breathe. At this rate, the cold would kill him before the dementor did. From miles away, he heard someone say, "Get him out," and, as if he were in a dream, he felt hands pulling him out of the door of the cage. He saw the dementor again through the heavy fog; it was coming even closer—

Someone screamed. A woman. Harry's muddled mind tried to figure out who was screaming and why and what was going on...

"Not Harry, not Harry, please not Harry."

"Stand aside, you silly girl...stand aside, now."

"Not Harry, please no, kill me instead..."

What...He felt the dementor's putrid hands grasp him by the neck, pulling him towards it...

...the sound of shattering glass. Somewhere, somewhere in his mind he knew why that sound was important, but he didn't know why. Wearily, he turned towards its source, towards the window and Sirius. A beak in the window. Nighttime. A flash of black robes. Sirius jumped, stumbled, caught himself. "Leave him alone," he said bravely, "It's me you want." Harry could see his godfather shake at the sight of the dementor, and the man's eyes darted from person to person, like a cornered wolf.

The dementor merely stared at him, its attention diverted from Harry, but everyone else jumped into action. Several stunners were fired in Sirius's direction. The man was able to dodge a few, but one of the red beams inevitably hit him in the chest and he fell motionless to the ground.

"What's going on?" someone shouted finally, looking back and forth between Harry and Sirius. By this time, Harry had come out of his trance enough to struggle away from the dementor and he rushed to Sirius' side, nudging his godfather with his nose and whining.

Someone must have finally gotten Dumbledore and Fudge, because Dumbledore appeared in the doorway at that moment, peering around through his half moon spectacles, his eyes twinkling as if he were not aware of the problem at hand. He swept in, robes floating slightly behind him, and nodded at someone to speak. Fudge, a portly little man with rumpled greyish hair, hurried in a moment later only to find everyone speaking at once.

"Sir, we thought that—"

"—and then Black came through the window—"

"—finally caught the dog—"

"—almost gave it the Kiss!"

"—which one is—"

Dumbledore put a hand up to silence them and opened his mouth to speak, but because today was truly a day of both surprises and interruptions, for Remus and Arthur both burst into the room.

"Wait! We've got Pettigrew! He's alive!" And so they did—floating in the air was the petrified form of Peter Pettigrew. The man was small, with a bald patch in his unkempt hair, and his watery eyes were the only thing moving, darting around in a panic to see the faces of the people in the room.

"Well," said Dumbledore, letting only a hint of his shock show through, "I believe we need an explanation."

The room grew silent, all eyes on Remus and Arthur. "Wake him up, please," said the werewolf, gesturing to Sirius. A fair-haired woman muttered "Ennervate," and Sirius raised his head groggily, then shot to his feet, looking about the room wildly. When his eyes finally fell on the black, grimlike dog at his side, he knelt quickly, petting the dog in obvious relief.

"What's going on?" Fudge demanded, snapping out of his trance. "Why hasn't this man been executed?"

"Because he is innocent," said Remus quietly, in a sure tone of voice. The shouts and exclamations that this declaration brought about did not change his countenance; he was completely calm. He stared at Dumbledore with his amber eyes glowing. "And Pettigrew is here to help me prove it," he added once the noise had died slightly

"Surely," began Fudge with a slight smile, "Surely you cannot expect us to believe that this is Peter Pettigrew? He died years ago, there were witnesses—"

"They never found his body, did they?" asked Remus, a curious expression on his face. He was still staring at Dumbledore. "All they found," he said, pointing at the man's hand, "was a finger."

The silence at this point was deafening. Fudge broke it rather quickly. "You—"

"Cornelius," Dumbledore stopped him, and at that moment Harry suddenly understood why Remus had been staring at the Headmaster: Dumbledore was the only one the werewolf really needed to convince; everyone else would follow his lead. "I think it would be best if we allowed him to continue," he said. And with that, he gestured for Remus to go on.

"We all know that Sirius Black is an illegal animagus, but no one knew that Peter was—is—one as well. He has been masquerading

as the Weasleys' pet rat for years," he said. Eyes turned to Arthur, who nodded. "I assume he just needed a place to lie low," Remus continued, "a wizarding household where he could easily gather any news of his old master. Arthur works for the ministry, of course, so it was the perfect place to hide. But the rest of the story isn't mine to tell. It's Sirius's."

As one, every head in the room turned to face Sirius, who blinked in surprise. He cleared his throat and began to talk, explaining everything about Lily and James and how they switched secret keepers, how Peter had been the one to betray them, how Sirius had cornered his ex-friend, and how Peter had framed him.

When the animagus finally stopped speaking, no one could look at him with the exception of Dumbledore. Never had Sirius, or anyone else for that matter, seen such a horrorstruck, mournful, ashamed expression on the headmaster's face. His usually sparkling blue eyes had become dull; his lively, curious smile had vanished. His own weight seemed to be too much for him, it was as if he were in danger of sagging to the floor. A wrinkled hand moved up to cover his mouth, but the words he spoke were still audible in the now-silent room. "What have I done?"

There was no answer.

Sirius spoke calmly, "He needs to be given Veritaserum."

"I think we hardly need—" began Fudge.

"Yes, you need to," interrupted Sirius quietly. "You didn't give me Veritaserum. The least you can do for me now is give him some. Then you'll have all the evidence you need."

Dumbledore could only look away.

There was a hustle of movement; someone had gone to fetch some Veritaserum, and everyone else crowded around Pettigrew. Many people still refused to meet his eyes, but a few gave the animagus tentative smiles, as though silently saying that they were sorry.

Dumbledore approached Sirius slowly. "Sirius," the old man said quietly, lowering his voice to give them a degree of privacy, "I'm so sorry. I should have known—" here he broke off, putting a hand over his eyes. "I don't suppose you can forgive an old man for his mistakes?" he asked wearily.

"I already have," said Sirius softly, shaking his head. "and besides, I suppose even the all-knowing make mistakes sometimes," he added with a smile.

Dumbledore looked at him, a slow, slight smile stretching across his wrinkled face. "Thank you, my boy." He murmured. And that was all that needed to be said.

The Veritaserum came, but the last thing Sirius wanted to do was hear Peter's voice. He knelt next to Harry again and, under the pretense of petting the dog, whispered, "Go out and change. Come back in five minutes." Harry nudged his hand gently—which Sirius took to mean that he understood—and left.

The remainder of the questioning lasted only a moment more; most were satisfied with Pettigrew's admittances. "I believe," said Fudge, inflating himself pompously as though he were doing a huge favor, "that there is no longer any need for this dementor," he gestured to an Auror, who quietly led the dementor away, "and that a full pardon is in order."

"But what of Sirius' escape?" asked someone Sirius recognized as Professor McGonagall. "And what of the boy, Harry? Do you mean to say that you've had nothing to do with his disappearance?"

The door swung open—Perfect timing, thought Sirius—for the nth time that night, capturing the attention of the room. There stood Harry, his twisted grin on his face, emerald eyes sparkling.

"Harry!" cried a few people in surprise, and Dumbledore rushed forward himself to get a better look at him. He grasped Harry's arms just below the shoulders and held the child at arm's distance, looking at him long and hard. At length, he found whatever it was he had been looking for, and he beamed. "Welcome back, my boy." He said,

extending a hand, and Harry, smiling as well, shook it. “I think that further explanation is in order,” he said at last, “and this time I believe it is young Harry’s turn.”

All eyes fell on Harry, who took an involuntary step backwards. It seemed to him that a million people stood in the room, each staring at him expectantly. Luckily, Sirius seemed to sense his predicament and walked over to place a comforting hand on his godson’s shoulder.

“What do I say?” Harry whispered up to Sirius.

“Why don’t you start at the beginning, when you left your relatives?” Harry touched Sirius’s hand and nodded.

And so he took a deep breath and began. He touched on the fact that his uncle had beaten him, surprising and angering many people in the room. He explained why he had run away, and how Sirius had found him about a year later, how they had gone to the Safehouse. He mentioned how Remus had confronted them and found Sirius innocent. He neglected, however, to mention anything about his being a shapeshifter. He admitted that he had indeed hit Podmore over the head to save his godfather, and innocently told them about the black dog he had found to use as a distraction. Finally, he ended his story, shifting his weight anxiously as he felt the weight of the million thoughtful eyes still on him.

“Well if that don’t beat all!” Exclaimed an odd-looking, balding Auror. And the room burst into noise.

Fudge spoke up again. “Yes, yes, the boy is quite a hero. We must arrange some sort of recognition, I suppose, for the both of them. Perhaps—”

“I want full custody of my godson.” Sirius announced, pulling Harry close. The child in question looked up at him, a mixture of surprise and happiness on his face.

“Yes, oh, of course,” said the minister, and Sirius noticed at this point that the man still had not looked him in the eye—as though the animagus was a painful mistake he’d rather not think about.

Harry took a deep breath. “And,” he added quietly, noting that noise in the room dwindled quickly as he began to speak, “I think you should recompensate Sirius for his job—after all, he would still be an Auror if it weren’t for your assumptions and your justice system.”

Fudge blinked, reddened, and blustered, “Well, I—that is to say...I don’t think that—”

“Because I’m sure we could find a lawyer who would agree.” Harry added, and Sirius raised his eyebrows with a slight smirk.

The Minister of Magic looked quite like a fish out of water, opening and closing his mouth a few times at the thought that he would not only be giving Sirius Black a large sum of money but that he was being forced to do so by a mere child. He looked around the room for help, but many of the Aurors simply averted their gaze and allowed the minister struggle with his greed.

“You can’t do that,” Fudge blurted out. “You’re only seven!”

“Seven and a quarter.” Harry retorted softly, with a slight grin on his face. Remus and Sirius exchanged amused glances over the child’s head.

“Well—you—I mean...Of course he will be paid in full! I was just thinking of—er—something else...” he finished lamely. “Anyway,” he said, drawing himself up again, “we’ll sort out this whole thing with Pettigrew.” And, not without a final glance in Harry’s direction, he disappeared into the fireplace, followed by many of the people in the room.

Sirius immediately hugged his godson. “Harry, you were amazing! You—”

“Harry. Remus. Sirius.” Dumbledore’s voice surprised them. “I’d like a word with you please. In my office.”

Dumbledore’s office was unlike anything Harry had ever expected. As he sat in the soft chair between Remus and Sirius, he couldn’t help

but look around in open awe at the instruments and tools there, the books and statues, the portraits, and the red-plumed bird next to the headmaster's desk. Sirius and Remus were both staring at him in amusement as Dumbledore sat down, and Harry blushed shyly once he noticed.

"I must admit that I have the feeling that Harry's retelling of events was not entirely truthful," Dumbledore said bluntly, drawing their attention to him. His blue eyes were twinkling once more.

Harry shifted somewhat guiltily in his seat. "Um..."

"There is some incident, perhaps, where you neglected to tell everything..."

Sirius and Remus watched Harry, who shifted in his seat again and opened his mouth to speak.

"I am a shapeshifter, sir."

A/N: PLEASE DON'T KILL ME! I know it's been well over a month, and I'm really sorry! Blame my teachers—with all of the homework/projects/essays/midterms I've been dealing with, I feel like I've just run a marathon or something! I just got out of school yesterday, and I sat down and wrote this entire chapter to make it up to you guys.

Thanks bunches to all of my reviewers—if it weren't for you guys, I probably would have taken a few days off to catch my breath, but I got so many people bugging me to update I felt like I should get to work!. : P I'm not going to do review responses, though, because I'm going to hurry to get the next chapter out in the next few days (maybe even for a Christmas gift!).

Anyway, just to let you know: according to my plans there are only three chapters left! I can't believe I'm close to finishing! :) Things are (almost) wrapped up...

moonfyre

Nineteen—Harry Explains (December 29, 1987)

In all his years, Sirius had never believed it possible to stump or thoroughly surprise the headmaster. Much of his time while he was a student at Hogwarts had been spent inventing ways to shock the old man, and many of the pranks the Marauders had pulled were created for the sole purpose of making him jump or wince. But everything had failed, and at long last the Marauders had admitted their only defeat: they could not surprise the Headmaster.

Naturally, when Sirius had shocked the Headmaster with his innocence earlier, the animagus had considered it a personal victory. But apparently he had some competition, because Harry, a child less than half his age, had shocked the old man speechless.

When Harry admitted that he was a shapeshifter, Dumbledore's eyes grew very, very large, and Sirius began to wonder whether it was good for his health, at his age, to be thoroughly shocked twice in one day.

"A shapeshifter!" Dumbledore said softly. "A shapeshifter." It seemed to take a while for the idea to settle in the Headmaster's mind; he stared at Harry for a few moments and then asked, "How?"

Harry opened his mouth to speak, but Dumbledore answered his own question. "Of course, of course," he murmured to himself. "Shapeshifters are born randomly, it is not a hereditary matter..." his voice was too low for Sirius to catch much else. "...but the last shapeshifter...not in years...but the chances of you finding...it's astronomical!" His head shot up suddenly. "Would you be willing to let me see a small demonstration?"

"Sure," said Harry, slightly bewildered. He stood up and shifted into the black raven that Sirius and Remus had seen earlier and fluttered into the air to alight on Dumbledore's desk.

"Amazing," Dumbledore breathed, quickly leaning closer to the dark bird, who hopped back an inch or so. Sirius and Remus fought back

smiles at the awestruck expression on their former headmaster's face. "Phenomenal!"

Harry shifted back and settled comfortably into his chair.

"But then—..." the Headmaster adopted the appearance of one whose thoughts are flowing at a very fast pace. "You must have a--"

Harry nodded.

"And you've spoken to—"

Harry nodded again.

"Phenomenal!" Dumbledore repeated as he leaned back into the chair thoughtfully.

Remus and Sirius, who, until now, were having a good laugh at Dumbledore's expense, were now thoroughly confused. "What's he on about?" Sirius asked Harry, who was sitting back down.

"Well," Harry said slowly, "I don't think shapeshifters are quite as rare as everybody thinks they are. Probably...maybe one in a few thousand people are shapeshifters."

"But that's impossible," Remus said. "The last recorded shapeshifter was over three hundred years ago. I looked it up myself! If that were true—"

"Wait, wait, wait," Harry said quickly, holding his hands up in a sort of gesture of peace against Remus's flood of information. "I only meant that about one in two thousand people can become a shapeshifter. I mean, they're shapeshifters and don't know it, I guess."

He gave a lopsided grin. "There's only one rule you have to follow to be a shapeshifter: you need to befriend a boggart."

Sirius was looking at Harry oddly. "A boggart?" he echoed. "As in, hiding-in-the-closet, really-really-creepy, turn-into-what-you-fear-most boggarts?"

Harry's nose crinkled. "Not all boggarts are mean," Harry said, looking at Sirius. "But...I guess most are. I suppose you can see why hardly anyone becomes a shapeshifter."

"But you did," said Sirius. "Did you...?"

"Of course," Harry replied. "You haven't forgotten Devlin, have you?"

Sirius and Remus blinked several times, looking at Harry with their mouths open wide.

Harry smiled shyly and waited for them to snap out of their trances. Sirius said in awe, "He left for a second, on the roof! And then a hippogriff came..."

"And, of course, he was the 'poltergeist,'" Harry said, sounding amused.

"He—but why?"

"He thought it was funny. And not many people know that some boggarts like to play pranks when they get too bored. They do have a sense of humor."

"Sense of humor my—" Sirius grumbled.

"Wait," Said Remus. "So...so you're saying that you talk to Devlin? And he talks back?"

"Of course, or else he wouldn't been able to teach me anything." Harry replied.

The room was silent for a while. Harry played with the buttons on his jacket, acting as though he were completely oblivious to the fact that everyone was staring at him.

"But how is it that you came by Devlin?" asked the Headmaster at last. "And if both Remus and Sirius have seen him, why did he not change into what they fear most?"

Harry exhaled slowly and leaned back in his chair. “How about if I start at the beginning...”

(Sometime in 1986, in the nighttime)

It was storming outside, and rain was pelting the sidewalk so hard that Harry could hear it thundering in his ears even after he walked inside the horribly bright drugstore. There was a large, burly man sitting at the cash register reading a magazine. The man didn’t look up when Harry walked in, and the boy walked past quietly so he wouldn’t attract any unwanted attention. There were no other people in the store.

Really, it wasn’t the smartest idea Harry had ever had. He had been to this drugstore many times, but he had never come when it was a late, rainy evening. He was still rather new at stealing, and he hadn’t realized how a lone child in old, tattered clothing would attract attention in an empty store.

No sooner had he tucked a bag of chips into his pocket than the storekeeper shouted, “Hey! Put that back, kid!”

He looked up quickly to see the large man stalking toward him, his huge boots thumping on the floor. Harry suddenly darted forward; he was smaller and quicker, so he dodged to one side—

—and felt the man’s hands around his arm. “Not today, kid.” He pulled Harry back and grabbed the candies. “I bet you’re the one behind all the disappearing junk.”

“No, wait! But I wasn’t going to—”

The man didn’t listen. He dragged a struggling Harry out of the door and down the street, into the pouring rain that plummeted down on both of their heads. The cold water shocked Harry, who finally got around to screaming.

“Put me down, I don’t want to go with you!”

But it was late. And this street was never crowded, even during the day, and adding the pouring rain to the mix meant that the street was all but deserted. Yelling was no use, but he did it anyway.

“Help! Help!” Harry cried, still struggling. “Plea—”

The man held him more tightly, hurting Harry’s arm. “Quiet, kid,” he said, covering the boy’s mouth with a wet hand.

Harry knew this neighborhood—the police station half a block away. And he was even more afraid of the police than he was of the gangs that littered the area: if he was brought there, they’d take him back to...

“Help, someone!” He cried, his voice muffled through the man’s hands. He wriggled in the man’s arms, slithering in his wet clothes, shaking his dripping hair out of his eyes. “Please, anyone!” He whispered. And then he was answered, answered by someone or something much different than he could ever have expected.

Who calls? a voice asked. It was faint and low and old. And he heard it in his mind, not with his ears, not through the patterning rain. The man who was dragging him, though he seemed slightly bewildered that Harry had suddenly stopped struggling, did not stop. Harry didn’t know what was going on, or whether he was going insane, but he did know that the voice might very well be his last chance to escape.

“Please! Help me!” He struggled once more. “I can’t get away, and he won’t let go—”

I will help.

And suddenly, he heard a deep, low growl.

The man froze. His and Harry’s heads both turned towards a shadowy spot to one side of a closed store: in the alleyway between two buildings was a pair of golden eyes, ancient eyes that flashed in the darkness like a cat’s. A slender animal slunk out from the shadows and into the dim light—a wet but still beautiful striped tiger that growled, eyes on Harry’s captor.

The man's eyes widened and he dropped Harry, backing up slowly at first, as if his mind was still processing what his eyes were seeing, before turning around to run away, yelling wildly and glancing back every few seconds to make sure the animal was not following him.

But Harry still stood there, petrified. He could not make himself move, even to take a single step backwards.

The tiger sat. It didn't so much as glance in the man's direction, though his howls had yet to fade into the night. It sat and looked straight at Harry, as though sizing him up.

Perhaps if Harry had been older and wiser, he would have run away as well. But he was still young and quite curious, and the tiger had done nothing to harm him yet. He allowed himself to relax a little, and the tiger looked pleased.

You aren't afraid of me. it said, and in Harry's mind its voice sounded much kinder than it had before.

"Not so much." Harry whispered, shaking his head slightly. Water flew from his hair. "You aren't going to hurt me?"

He felt it smile. No.

"Then I'm not scared."

Good. What is your name?

"I'm Harry."

Well, Harry. Because you can speak to me, and because you aren't afraid, I believe I have a proposition for you.

"A proposition?"

Yes. I can teach you things, Harry. And, if you say yes, I will travel with you and become your companion.

But Harry had lived with the Dursleys, after all. “But what do you want from me in return?”

Nothing but your friendship.

“And what will you teach me?”

That question, it said, can only be answered if you accept my offer.

Perhaps, in this instant, it was lucky that Harry was neither old nor wise. He was not suspicious, and did not want to walk away from a chance to learn about this creature, and maybe to have a friend.

“Alright,” he said, “I accept.”

Good, said the tiger, and suddenly it was a medium sized brown dog.

“Whoa!” Harry exclaimed, “How did you do that?”

I’ve always been rather partial to this form, the creature said. Harry felt it smile again. Soon you will be able to do it as well. But first I will tell you who I am: My name is Devlin, and I am a boggart.

(Sometime in 1986)

Devlin was true to his word. He taught Harry more than the child had ever wished to know, about magic and shapeshifters, the world in general, different people and languages. While Devlin had not actually been in the wizarding world in nearly a century, he still taught Harry all he knew about wizard practices. In return, Harry tried to teach the boggart not to speak in “oldspeak,” as the child called it...although he nearly regretted doing so once Devlin finally got the hang of sarcasm.

After only two months, the two of them had become nearly inseparable (regardless of the age difference of over five hundred years). The boggart traveled with him wherever he went, filling the roles of both protector and friend.

Finally, after half a year, Devlin was fully satisfied that Harry would be able to transform into whatever animal he wished. To the boy's immense delight, Devlin refused to leave the child, as was apparently normal for a boggart when it was finished training a shapeshifter. Devlin had become rather attached to the raven-haired child, and decided that as long as his protection and friendship were still needed, he would remain by his boy's side...

(December 19, 1987)

"My boy," said Dumbledore softly once Harry had at last finished his story. "This is amazing."

"But where is he?" inquired Remus.

"I wondered when you would ask." Harry said quietly, and he held a small hand out. A ring that Remus hadn't even noticed rested on Harry's finger—just a simple, gold ring—grew larger very quickly, sliding off the child's finger to land on the floor. Its color darkened to a medium brown and it grew fur...and there was Devlin, sitting obediently on the floor.

A/N: For the record, I think this chapter sucks. It sounded about ten times better in my head, but I think this is probably as good as it's gonna get...Oh well, I guess.:P

But now Devlin's secret is finally out! And now everything (hopefully) makes sense! When I read about the boggart for the first time in book three, it occurred to me that Harry should have a boggart as a friend/protector/sidekick. So obviously, the idea for this story has been running around in the back of my head forever. And the title for this chapter has been in my head since the formation of the plot bunny. Weird.

Anyway, Merry Christmas/Happy Holidays to everyone! I hope you have a good one, and a great new year!

moonfyre

Review!!!

Twenty—Endings

(December 19, 2987)

“Why didn’t you tell us?” Remus asked once Harry had finished explaining, and once he and Sirius had gotten over their initial shock. “You know we wouldn’t have told anyone.”

Harry smiled, a small hand reaching down to pet Devlin gently on the head. “It wasn’t my choice.”

It was mine.

The child looked faintly amused as the Headmaster and his two guardians jumped in their seats at the new voice that penetrated their minds. The three of them stared openly at the brown dog sitting with his head in Harry’s lap.

Sirius looked at Devlin, shell-shocked. “Was that...?”

Yes, I am a boggart, and I am speaking. You don’t think that I spoke to Harry in sign language, do you?

“N-no, but—”

Harry rolled his eyes, deciding to help his godfather out of his predicament. “Devlin is rather...wizard-shy,” he said.

Wizard-suspicious, corrected the boggart.

“Yes, that,” Harry said dryly. “I don’t think boggarts trust wizards much. But I guess that’s obvious since they turn into our worst nightmares to scare us away.”

“But why don’t they trust wizards, anyway?” asked Remus.

“I’m...not exactly sure about that, honestly. I guess it’s because—”

Wizards were fearful of us far longer than we were of them, Devlin interrupted. I suppose it had something to do with never knowing

when we were around. A strange glint entered the dog's eyes, and something gleaming in their depths made it apparent that the dog was somehow wilder, somehow stranger than it had been a moment ago.

Humans are often afraid of that which they do not understand, mistrustful of what they cannot see and control. They were afraid of us, and they chased us away. And so now, we make them afraid of us, and we chase them away in return.

The room was silent. Sirius spoke up. "I'm sorry, but it's still a bit difficult to wrap my head around the fact that you're actually talking to us."

Not surprising, considering—, Devlin murmured in their minds. Harry gave his friend a nudge to shut him up.

Sirius spluttered slightly, exclaiming, "What is that supposed to mean?"

Dumbledore cleared his throat abruptly, and all eyes focused back on him. "I am quite sorry, Devlin," the man said respectfully, looking down his pointed nose at the boggart at Harry's feet. "Not all of us are as cruel as you deem we are. I hope you will someday be able to believe me."

The boggart moved a little closer to Harry. I do, Devlin said.

There was a silence; a clock on the wall ticked incessantly, its gleaming face marking twenty to the hour.

"If you thought that all humans were ignorant and unkind," Remus said suddenly, "why did you help Harry?"

The boggart looked up at his charge, a long and piercing gaze that made Harry look away. I was curious, I suppose. Devlin said. Harry smiled. The boggart's face then broke out in a doggy grin. I didn't know humans could get so small.

"Hey—" Harry began indignantly, but Dumbledore interrupted.

"As interesting as this conversation has become," the headmaster said lightly, looking at Sirius, "I believe that it might be for the best if you returned to your home to rest—I have no doubt that there will be several ceremonies or awards orchestrated by our esteemed Minister Fudge in the next few days, and it would be beneficial for you to recover your strength.

"However, I am rather interested in Devlin...perhaps one day I might borrow you for a time?" He said, addressing the dog.

Devlin stared again, looking at Dumbledore with the same odd, wise twinkle in his eyes that the headmaster himself usually possessed. He nodded. Perhaps.

The boggart stood as Harry did, heading toward the fireplace.

"Thank you, professor," said Remus, ever polite. They stepped into the fireplace and were gone.

A tornado had blown through the Safehouse. Or a hurricane. Either way, the entire place looked like a disaster area, with overturned furniture, fallen portraits, and miscellaneous clutter littering the floor.

Arabella was waiting for them. She jumped and looked up at them rather sheepishly.

"I'm afraid we went through some of the rooms a little...hurriedly," she said, making a new record for the understatement of the century. "I wanted to stay behind to help a bit."

Remus was the first to recover from his shock. "Thank you, Arabella," said Remus kindly, albeit rather dazedly.

"Arabella?" Harry inquired curiously a few seconds later. The name had tugged at something in his mind, something familiar. "That was the name of..."

The woman laughed. "The mad old lady across the street from you?" she asked lightly, and suddenly she murmured something and

became...old. Her hair drew itself into a tight, crisp bun, and her skin became leathery, wrinkled. She winked at him and changed herself back. "That's me. I was assigned to watch over you..." here she faltered. "I suppose I didn't do a very good job, though," she added, rather tiredly. "I'm sorry."

"It's alright." Harry said, though he felt that the dark blonde woman before him needed no forgiveness.

She cleared her throat. "Anyway," she said softly, turning to Sirius, "I guess I also came to apologize. I grew up with Lily and I knew you, but...I didn't even think twice when you were accused of betraying them...I just followed Dumbledore, and..."

"We all did," said Remus softly.

"It's fine," Sirius said quietly, "and what's done is done."

A rather awkward silence ensued after his statement, until Harry broke it by asking, "Are we going to clean this place up or not?"

The wizards and witch smiled down at the ebony-haired child and laughed at themselves, at their sober faces and serious manner. They pulled out their wands and began to work.

(December 22, 1987)

In the days that followed, Sirius felt that he, Remus, and Harry had gotten enough awards to last a lifetime. Fudge had them come out in public to issue a full pardon to Sirius (and to everyone's amusement, he did indeed give Sirius full monetary compensation for his time in Azkaban), various awards were handed out to them, Sirius was presented with a brand-new wand (his old one had been snapped), and both Sirius and Remus were both given the Order of Merlin, Third Class (although, of course, Sirius complained that he deserved Second Class, at the very least).

But naturally, it was with great pleasure that they were finally able to settle into the Safehouse for good. While all of them were now free to roam wherever they wanted, for a number of days they fell back into

their old, safe routines, content to stay home, playing board games, reading books, and of course, having several snowball fights. Their customary paranoia made it so that Sirius didn't truly realize that he was a free man until the three of them had gone down to the shops one snowy afternoon. It suddenly hit him (as he sipped the hot chocolate that he had tricked Remus into buying them) that there was no need for him to worry or hide himself or Harry any longer.

What ensued was a rather amusing dance in the middle of the sidewalk that Harry eventually joined and that Remus snapped blackmail pictures of.

The other inhabitant of the Safehouse, however was rather silent as of late. Devlin spoke mostly to Harry and hardly at all to Remus or Sirius.

"Give him time," Harry said. "He'll warm up to you eventually."

And so things began to settle almost into normalcy, or at least as normal as it could become with a werewolf, a shapeshifter, and an ex-convict all living in the same house. There was much more laughter in the house now that everything had wound itself into a conclusion, and Sirius was convinced that it was as close to perfection as anyone could get.

Which was why he was rather startled when he walked past Harry's room late one night to see Harry sitting up in bed, staring out of his window and clutching his knees to his chest.

"Hey, kiddo," Sirius whispered to Harry. The child's head shot up quickly, and he hurriedly brushed some tears off of his face.

"Hey, Sirius," he murmured.

Sirius came over to sit next to Harry on the bed, careful to avoid Devlin's sleeping figure. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing." Harry said quickly. "Just a dream."

Sirius leaned over to pull Harry closer to him, and the child tensed a little. Sirius brushed away a stray tear. "I don't think so."

Harry lowered his head and looked away, shifting uncomfortably and allowing their conversation to dwindle into silence.

The animagus was about to press the subject further, and was surprised when Harry finally opened his mouth to speak again. "It was about my uncle."

Sirius nodded. "I'd guessed it was something like that. What did he do?"

"You know. The usual. He hit me."

Sirius paused. "Harry?"

"Hmm?"

"How often exactly do you have dreams like this?"

Harry sighed. "Not very often. This has been the first one in a while."

Sirius put a finger under Harry's chin and forced him to look at the animagus. "Are you telling the truth?"

Harry nodded, and Sirius was satisfied. He began to rub his godson's back gently. "It wasn't your fault, you know." He said slowly. "What your uncle did to you."

The boy was silent for a long time after this. Then he shook his head. "If I'd been stronger, or braver, it probably wouldn't have even happened." He said quietly.

Sirius shook his head. "Yes, it would have. Your uncle still would have hit you, no matter how old, how brave, how strong you were. He still would have done it no matter what."

Harry was silent, and it was rather obvious that the shapeshifter didn't believe him.

"Besides," Sirius added. "You are quite brave and strong enough as it is."

"Right."

"Really, Harry. Remus and I were talking about this the other day. It was absolutely brilliant of you, the way you came up with a plan to rescue me. And you were brave enough to pull it off."

"All I did was run away from the Aurors."

"And you were afraid, weren't you?"

"Yes. I was afraid. I'm always afraid."

"But you did it anyway."

"I had to."

"And that's my point," said Sirius. "You were afraid to do it, because it was dangerous and you couldn't get caught. And probably because you were alone the whole time. But you did it anyway, and that's what it means to be brave."

Harry looked at Sirius, questions in his eyes.

"Bravery doesn't mean you aren't afraid. It means that you're scared as h—that you're scared, but you do it anyway." Sirius pulled Harry close. "You're the bravest person I know, Harry."

It took a long time for Harry to hug him back, but he finally did, leaning on Sirius with a slight smile on his face. The shapeshifter finally fell asleep in his godfather's arms, comforted by his protective embrace.

Devlin watched.

A/N: Finally. I'm truly sorry this took so long (I know, I know, it's been over three months). I am not dead, and for those who were

wondering I will never abandon a story. Life just kept knocking me over, and things have been really hectic college-wise for a while. (College is stressing me out and I haven't even begun it yet!) Things have been really crazy, and I had to take a break and concentrate on my studies to pull up grades for a scholarship, etc. So I'm really, really sorry and I hope you guys haven't left.

Anyway. This chapter was hard to write, and it feels a little unfinished, but I wanted to get it out since it's been so long. The ending is my favorite part, though. :D

Also, I really hope to have the next (and last) chapter out within the next month, since things seem to be dying down a little, but we'll see how things go.

Thanks so much to everyone who reviewed and told me to keep going! I couldn't have made it this far without you--you guys are amazing!

Until next time,

moonfyre

Twenty-One—Epilogue

(December 24, 1987)

Sirius knew that Devlin was leaving before Harry did.

When the animagus had finally untangled himself from Harry, he gently covered the child with a blanket, and quietly left the room. It was quite early in the morning, earlier than usual for Sirius to be conscious, but for some reason he had awakened and could not return to sleep. He paused in the hall, halted in mid-stride by an odd feeling, and stared out the window at the falling snow with a strange sense of apprehension.

Devlin sat at the door, in his dog form, watching Sirius as he stepped downstairs. Sirius could count on one hand the number of times the boggart had spoken to him since they had come back to the Safehouse. Devlin had not seemed to take kindly to either Sirius or Remus, despite Harry's continued argument to the contrary, and Sirius was quite unnerved to be in a room alone with the silent creature.

However, this morning Devlin had something to say. I'm going.

Sirius suddenly remembered Harry explaining that Devlin often left for a week or so for no apparent reason, and that the dog had always returned home safely. For some reason, Sirius felt that this was different; the way the boggart spoke those words made it seem...final.

"You're...leaving? For how long?"

Devlin looked straight at him, in his eyes the now-familiar gleam that made him seem wiser than any animal could ever be. At the same time, Sirius became suddenly aware of the aura of wildness and oldness that surrounded the creature. I may not return for a long time. And I may not return at all.

Sirius paused. "What about Harry?"

The creature was silent for a moment. He has you now, it said, and Sirius couldn't help but feel that the words were spoken with...bitterness?

Sirius shook his head. "But he needs you. You were his first friend. You know more about him than...anyone. He loves you, Devlin."

If the animagus wasn't mistaken, the boggart's eyes softened a little. He does, I suppose. But the matter remains the same—the shapeshifter and his boggart always part at the end of the training, and Harry's training ended a very long time ago.

"That doesn't matter," Sirius said—however little he knew about this creature, he knew that it would hurt Harry badly if the boggart left. "He needs you."

And furthermore, the boggart continued as if he had not heard Sirius speak at all, It is...difficult for me to remain forever cooped up in one place. I was not meant for this, and Harry knows it. He always knew that I would have to leave him one day.

Sirius sighed slowly. "You know he'll be hurt." He said, meeting those strange eyes.

Devlin nodded. This is the way it has to be.

"Won't you wait to say goodbye?" Sirius asked.

The boggart looked away. I am not very good at goodbyes, he said softly as he rose to his feet. Then he spoke quietly, the voice in Sirius's mind echoing so dimly that Sirius couldn't be sure he had heard anything at all. And I believe that if Harry begged me to stay, I would.

Sirius opened the door uncertainly. He watched as the dog slid past him onto the step outside. The boggart then stopped suddenly, as if a thought had suddenly occurred to him. Devlin turned back to face Sirius. Sirius Black, he said. I feel you should know that I would never leave Harry if I didn't know he would be well cared for. And if I cannot

protect him, I am glad he will be in your care. Sirius blinked, rather shocked at the compliment.

And with that the padded away soundlessly. Sirius watched him stepping carefully through the snow, his dark fur becoming spotted with the falling snowflakes. The animagus watched until the dog slipped into the dark woods outside, and then he gently closed the door.

By the time Harry came downstairs a little later, Sirius had already told Remus what happened. They were sitting on one of the sofas in silence, each lost in their thoughts and their questions. At the sound of Harry's feet on the stairs, the somber pair suddenly looked up quickly, exchanging apprehensive glances.

"Wow," Harry said as he came to stand before them. "I'm the last one up for a change. Even Devlin woke up before me."

Sirius and Remus exchanged glances.

"Harry," Remus said slowly, "perhaps you should sit down."

Harry blinked, looking at Remus with a curious expression. Remus motioned for Harry to sit between his guardians "Okay," he said, sitting obediently.

"Well," Sirius fumbled, "I guess I should just come out and tell you. This morning, after I woke up, I came downstairs and found that Devlin was leaving."

Harry just looked at them oddly and shrugged. "Okay, I guess. I told you, he always leaves for a while. But he always comes back. He'll be back soon enough."

Sirius shook his head. "No, Harry. He left," He paused, then hurried on, "and I don't think he's coming back this time."

Harry stared at Sirius with for a long time, as if he were waiting for the punch line. He slowly looked to Remus, whose expression mirrored

the somber look on Sirius's face. Harry's hands gripped his knees, and he shook his head slowly in disbelief. "He's...gone?"

Sirius and Remus both nodded anxiously. Harry paused, frozen for a moment, before he suddenly slumped back into the sofa. Sirius saw in the child's face that what Devlin had said was true—the slow, shocking realization that was creeping over Harry's face meant that Harry had known that the boggart would leave him one day. But the child had obviously not imagined that it would be so soon.

"I can't believe it. Why wouldn't he tell me?"

"I think...I mean, he might have said that he'd stay if you asked him to, and he really felt he needed to leave."

Harry looked away. "Alright." The child said tonelessly.

"Are you—" Sirius began.

"I'm fine."

Breakfast was rather quiet, as Harry wasn't speaking much. Remus and Sirius often unsuccessfully tried to draw him into their conversations, but in the end, the two opted to leave the shapeshifter alone for a little while.

But then the rest of the day was quiet, and serious. There were no fights, no games, no laughter. Harry ate his meals in silence, and left his guardians to exchange worried glances behind him. Remus went upstairs at the end of the day to read Harry his usual bedtime story, but by the time he entered the shapeshifter's room, the boy was already asleep.

Christmas Eve dawned with a heavy snowstorm that battered the walls of the Safehouse and kept its inhabitants close to the fireside. Remus and Sirius relaxed on the sofas downstairs and shared a few conversations and stories, but each kept a close watch on the shapeshifter who sat in the far corner near a window.

Harry was curled up in an armchair, a warm blanket wrapped around his shoulders as he peered out into the storm. From time to time, the snow outside rattled the window or made eerie whistling sounds that surprised the boy and momentarily removed him from his depressing thoughts, but for the most part Harry sat motionless in the chair, a faraway look in his eyes.

Remus had attempted to cheer the child up by bringing him a cup of hot chocolate (which, of course, had more marshmallows in it than actual drink), but the boy had only granted the werewolf a soft smile and a few sips of the warm beverage before he carefully placed it aside to continue staring out into the storm.

In the end, Sirius and Remus had retreated back toward the fireside in low spirits. “It’s the day before Christmas,” Sirius said suddenly to Remus, though he was careful to be quiet so Harry wouldn’t hear, “and he shouldn’t be like this. He should be bouncing up and down and wondering what his presents will be. He should be trying to get us all to go to sleep at noon so tomorrow will come sooner.”

Remus sighed, and glanced over at the shapeshifter, who sighed softly, still oblivious to his guardians’ attention. “What are we supposed to do? His best friend—his only friend—just left, and probably for good.” The werewolf slowly sipped from a cup of hot chocolate. “I don’t know if he’ll cheer up before Christmas.”

“Well, we’ve got to do something about this. He can’t spend the entire day like this.”

They were silent for a few moments, and Remus stared thoughtfully into the fire. Sirius watched the other man warily as the werewolf’s face showed the ideas turning about in his mind. Remus suddenly fixed his eyes on Sirius. “You need to go talk to him.”

“Me?” Sirius spluttered. “I can’t talk to him. You’re the one who’s good at this sort of thing. You should do it.”

Remus shook his head and leaned back against the chair. “No, I think you ought to go do it.” He eyed Sirius critically. “You’re getting better at the whole godfather thing.”

Sirius's mouth opened and then closed. "That's not a reason," he said, rather sullenly. But Remus fixed him with that Just Get On With It, You Know I'm Right stare that he had used so often back at Hogwarts.

The animagus reluctantly stood. "Some Christmas present Devlin gave us," he grumbled.

Harry didn't move when Sirius pulled an armchair next to him, not that the animagus had expected him to. Harry didn't even notice when Sirius sat down and proceeded to stare at him for several minutes. The animagus thought he could faintly hear Harry humming something softly and slowly, but he couldn't be quite sure. When Sirius finally tired of being ignored, he gently placed his hand on Harry's arm. The boy looked at him in surprise.

"Hey, Sirius," Harry said faintly.

"Hey. How are you doing?"

"I'm okay." Sirius gave Harry a look. "Well...not too good, I guess."

"That's what I thought," the animagus said. He patted his lap for Harry to come sit in it, and the shapeshifter slowly obliged, curling up in Sirius's arms. It was silent for a moment as the pair observed the swirling snowflakes in the window, and as Sirius gathered his thoughts.

"Sirius?" Harry said suddenly.

"Yeah?"

"Why did he leave?"

Sirius paused, not sure what to say. "I can't say for sure, Harry," he said slowly.

"It's just that...he stayed with me for so long. I remember him saying that boggarts always left after the training was over, but he stayed for so much longer. I just thought...maybe..."

“...that he was planning on staying forever?” Sirius finished. He felt his charge nod into his chest. Sirius ran a hand through the messy hair beneath his chin. “I think,” he said, almost confidently, “that he stayed as long as he could.”

Harry was quiet. Then, “What do you mean?”

“I don’t think he could stay forever—maybe it’s in his nature not to. But I think, because he loved you, he stayed as long as he was able.” Sirius waited for a response, but Harry was silent in his arms. Sirius continued to run a hand through Harry’s hair every now and then in a comforting gesture, as the pair listened to the wind howling outside. They stayed that way for a very long time, and Sirius’s legs began to fall asleep under Harry’s weight. His body became stiff and slightly restless after being still for such a long time, but Sirius continued to sit in silence, content to hold Harry in his arms.

After some time, Sirius felt something warm and wet on his chest. His brow furrowed and he shifted slightly, craning his neck to see that Harry was crying. His tears were running silently down his cheeks, and he wept with an almost calm expression: his face was not distorted in sadness but rather looked only melancholy. He breathed sharply in little sobs every now and then, and he clutched Sirius’s shirt as though it were a lifeline.

“It’s alright, Harry,” Sirius murmured soothingly, pulling Harry closer. “It’s alright.”

Harry sniffled, and for a few moments there was only silence again. Then, Harry spoke, in a voice almost too quiet for Sirius to hear.

“I thought that maybe if I was a good friend to him, he would stay. I thought if I was good to him, maybe he wouldn’t...” Harry’s sobs grew a little louder. “It’s not fair. I wanted him to stay.”

Sirius was quiet for a long time. He held Harry close and rubbed circles on the boy’s back, murmuring soothing words into his ear every now and then. The boy’s tears slowed and his crying quieted, and a slow smile spread across Sirius’s face.

"Harry," he said softly. "It doesn't have to be forever, you know."

Harry looked up at his godfather, his green eyes shimmering with sadness. "What do you mean?"

"I think...I know that you'll meet Devlin again someday. And I have the feeling that he'll come to check on you more times than you'll know."

Harry sniffled again. "You think so?"

"Yes. And I bet, if he was watching you right now, he wouldn't want you to be crying over him like this. He'd want to see you strong and happy." Harry turned his head back down so that it rested on Sirius's chest and his hair brushed against his godfather's chin.

"Strong and happy," Harry repeated slowly, as if committing the words to memory. The wind howled especially violently against the window pane as Harry curled further into his guardian's warm embrace. "Sirius?" he said after a moment.

"Yeah?"

"You really think he'll come back?"

"I know he will."

"How?"

Sirius paused to smile into Harry's mane of hair. "I know because if it were me, I don't think I could bear being away from you for very long."

Harry picked his head up to look Sirius in the eye once more, and his green eyes flickered across his guardian's face as though he were searching for something. Upon finding whatever it was, a warm smile graced his features and he hugged the man tightly. "Thank you, Sirius," he murmured.

And as Harry smiled to himself as he looked out into the snow with hope in his eyes, Sirius decided that perhaps he really was getting better at this whole godfather thing.

May the road rise up to meet you.
May the wind always be at your back.
May the sun shine warm upon your face,
And rains fall soft upon your fields.
And until we meet again,
May God hold you in the palm of His hand.

--An Irish Farewell (1)

(1) I always imagined that Devlin (and boggarts in general) came from Ireland or maybe Scotland. Don't ask me why. I suppose I've always imagined that the cooler, wilder magical beings came from these two places. And when I mentioned that Harry was humming, I imagined that he was humming this song.

A/N: I can't believe it's OVER! I hate endings. I always have. At the end of every movie, every book, every story, I feel so depressed. I want to know what happens next—did they really live happily ever after? Or were there more adventures after that?

This chapter felt so hard to write, because I want to know the rest and to imagine more stories for this universe. I want to see what happens to Devlin, and how Harry grows up.

So I'm going to write a sequel. Only, I can't do it right away for two reasons: One, I have no idea what happens next. Or I do, but it's not really finalized yet. Two: I have so many hundreds of plot bunnies running around in my head that if I don't do something soon I'll get brain damage.

In other words, I'm probably going to be starting a new story first, and then I'll get back to this one. But I'm hoping to put up a one-shot in this universe before then.

Thanks to everyone who has reviewed, to everyone who has made me feel better, and to everyone who has helped me to become a

better writer. I couldn't have done any of this without you guys. You're amazing! It would be great if you would review this chapter too, even if it's been ten years since I updated this story. I always love feedback, and you guys help me so much! Thanks again!

Until next time!

moonfyre